

In Nomine Iesu

19th Sunday after Trinity John 9:1-11 – Seeing is not believing

“As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud and said to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ Some said, ‘It is he.’ Others said, ‘No, but he is like him.’ He kept saying, ‘I am the man.’ So they said to him, ‘Then how were your eyes opened?’ He answered, ‘The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, “Go to Siloam and wash.” So I went and washed and received my sight.’ They said to him, ‘Where is he?’ He said, ‘I do not know.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose word opens eyes and minds. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

When speaking to people, we tend to focus on their eyes. It is an important part of the process of communication. A person’s eyes tell us something. But what about when you cannot do that? You have all seen or perhaps even know someone who was born blind. Their very appearance tells you that their eyes never developed enough for them to see anything. Such would have been the case with the man Jesus encountered in our text this morning. As you can imagine, the man was easily recognizable and thus well known to the people of his neighborhood in Jerusalem, where he had lived for a long time. After Jesus opened the man’s eyes, as you can also imagine, his appearance would have changed quite significantly. People would have, literally, looked at him differently. That is why, as John reports, “The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ Some said, ‘It is he.’ Others said, ‘No, but he is like him.’”

I

It is not hard to understand how this confusion could have happened. But please take note of what John tells us immediately after this. The man whose eyes were opened, “**kept saying**, ‘I am the man.’” I am the man! People saw the man both before and after Jesus opened his eyes. Some believed what they had seen and were now seeing. Some did not. Dear friends, seeing is not believing.

We live in an age that is not much different from that in which the once-blind man listened to his neighbors argue with each other about him but would **not listen to**

him. Yes, technology has changed so greatly that we may think we live in a world that is much different than back then. But man has not changed at all. People still trust what they see far more than what they hear. If anything, this situation will likely get worse rather than better. For example, can you imagine how bad this is going to get as Artificial Intelligence more and more dominates what it is that we see on our cell phone screens and all the other screens that we look at so much more willingly and readily than we listen to people and their words?

Yet there is still more to this story than first meets the eye. Consider what Jesus' disciples asked at the beginning of our text: "As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'" The bad news is that sin and its corruption are in the world and have been from the time of Adam. It affects all of us, some perhaps more profoundly than others such as the man born blind. But sin's corruption does this not necessarily because of what we or anyone has done. It is exactly for this reason that the Son of God became man, to redeem us from sin, all sin and all its consequences, whether caused by any individual or just the result of the corruption of our fallen world. What Jesus was about to do, was going to be a lesson for all people.

What is ironic in this account is that the only one who seems to grasp the true significance of Jesus **and His works**, is the one who was blind – which in itself should be a lesson to all. Before we pass on, let us understand how great a miracle this truly is. Consider the words the blind man spoke to the religious authorities who repeatedly questioned him and everyone. He said to them in the face of their implacable disbelief, "Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind." (John 9:32) And do you know what? Even now, 2000 years later, that is still true. This man was and quite possibly remains the only person truly and fully blind from birth whose eyes were opened. This is no minor miracle. It is as great a miracle as God causing light to shine out of nothing in the darkness of the creation.

II

Do you understand the significance of Jesus **and His works**? I ask this because the Apostle John devotes this entire chapter of his gospel – forty-one verses! – to this one account. He does it to make you – not help you but give you the **ability**! – to understand the nature of faith and the nature of unbelief. Don't look at what Jesus is doing but listen to what He is saying. Why? Because the word of God teaches very plainly and clearly, "Faith comes **by hearing**, and hearing **through the word of Christ**." (Romans 10:17) Faith comes by hearing, hearing the powerful, creative word of God. Light first shone in the world because God said, "Let there be light."

Do you understand the significance of Jesus and His works? Consider this, you did not live in the blind man's neighborhood as those in the story. You did not see him

grow from childhood onward into adulthood going about the streets blind, sitting and begging passers-by for help. You did not, as many in that neighborhood almost certainly did, know the story of his blindness, feel the shame of his parents – or pity them - who very likely thought, as did Jesus' own disciples, that they and their failure to live as God would have them do were the cause of their son's blindness. No, to all this you are blind. You have only heard. And that is a good thing, for all you can do is listen to Jesus, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." Those works were displayed in this man **for you**, that you might hear and believe, and so have your blind-from-birth spiritual eyes opened to the reality that God did indeed "so love the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) Jesus did this for you that you might not die but live.

Lest you think it a small thing that you believe, it too is as great a miracle as that of opening the blind man's eyes. Why? Because similarly with the man blind from birth whose eyes not only saw nothing, but whose brain, from infancy onward, had never developed the ability to process information from his eyes – and this on the basis of what is known today from science is the greatest part of this miraculous healing - you hear the words of Christ and your heart and mind, which were as shut and incapable of grasping that God is gracious and merciful as the hearts of those Pharisees who looked at this great act of kindness and love, and hated Jesus all the more. That you believe is an incredibly great miracle. It is, as the Apostle Paul later said, "The gift of God, not of works."

God has gifted you with faith. He has gifted you by grace alone, to understand that your sins are all forgiven You for Jesus' sake, to know that He is good and will unfailingly stay with you, leading you ever onward to eternal life. How could you not want to hear this assurance week after week until your eyes close in death, only to be opened to see Your Savior in paradise?

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Finally, you might say, but wait a minute, pastor, didn't Jesus also say, and in this very incident, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world"? Dear friend, He did indeed! But what did He promise you? What did He say? "I will not leave you as orphans." (John 14:18) He promised you and every one of His disciples, His believers: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And **behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**" (Matthew 28:18-20) You came here today to be with Jesus. He will not disappoint you. For in word and sacrament, as He Himself promised you, He is with you to bring you light and life. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria