

Sermon — August 30, 2026

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Have you seen one of those viral videos on Facebook or YouTube where there's a child, like normally like a really young child, like a baby, and they're sitting with their parents in the doctor's office, and someone comes over with tiny little baby glasses, and it's the child's first ever time wearing glasses to correct their eyesight. And this child all of a sudden who's only been able to hear their parents' voices, they slide the glasses onto the child and then all of a sudden they can see all of a sudden. And it's kind of scary at first because they've only heard the voices of their parents. They've never seen their parents, but all of a sudden they're connecting the voice with what they see.

Why are those videos so fascinating and so powerful? Well, for those of us with glasses or contact lenses, I know like the first time when I got glasses in middle school, I realized that there's actually leaves on the tree. Like that was amazing. I could actually see like the rays of the sun, you know, coming out through the clouds. And I just thought that that was just in pictures. I didn't know what I was missing. So, how much more can it be for someone to all of a sudden be able to see clearly, especially those who you love so clearly in front of you? The disciples come to Jesus about this man who was born blind. And they ask, "Who was it?"

This man or his parents who sinned that he was born blind?" And Jesus answers them, "Neither this man nor his parents. This man has been blind since birth. And in those days, it meant that he was not going to have very many opportunities to get anywhere in his life. Perhaps he would have been just one more beggar at the gates in Jerusalem. To make it worse, most of the people that he encountered would have thought that either him or his parents had sinned somewhere in their lives to earn this blindness. Can someone hit the big red button over here? Thank you. Even Jesus disciples wonder what he had done wrong or what his parents did wrong or what had caused him to go be born blind.

The disciples had evidently been taught according to their upbringing in Jerusalem that sin and hurt or injury, even handicap would have been linked together with the result of someone's human sin. But that poses many, many questions. We're living in a fallen world. From Genesis to Revelation, the scriptures tell us that we're living in a broken world, a fragmented world, a world which is not as it should be and not as it will be. And for the present, we're afflicted by these hurts and these injuries, these damages and hardships. And that's the hard part of life. It's a result of human sin coming into the world. But many of us think that we've escaped that because we weren't born with those sort of handicaps.

But in fact, we all do have handicaps of some kind or another. How many years did that man grope in the darkness? Asking God, why me? Why can everyone else see, but I can't see anything? My whole life, I've listened to people talk about what they've been seeing, and I can only imagine. But I don't even have experiences or memories to aid me in my imagination because I've never seen anything. Why me? I wonder sometime times if things really changed for us in that respect. At our worst, it seems that we assume that people who have gotten ahead in life have somehow been more blessed by God and those who suffer do so as a result of their sin. At our worst, we judge other people based on those assumptions.

Or just as bad, we judge ourselves based on those assumptions. But Jesus sees things differently. He tells his disciples that there's more here than meets the eye. This particular man was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. And that God had a plan and a purpose for his life. And that Jesus comes along. And that's true for us, too. For reasons that we don't know, Jesus spits in the mud,

takes some dirt and the clay, and takes that clay as if he's almost saying, "Not everyone who has been born blind and had been born from clay got everything right the first time around. Some people are born with birth defects, and this man was one of them." So maybe Jesus was saying, "Let's go back to the clay." Pure speculation, maybe.

But there's nothing particularly magical or anything chemically correct about Palestinian clay. Sorry guys, it's just Jesus. There's no perfect formula. And I think that's the point. Jesus is administering a touch. He's got the perfect object lesson, the perfect Sunday school lesson right here. Jesus takes the clay and he puts it on the man's eyes and he sends him to the pool of Salom saying, "Go to the pool of Salom and wash. Go wash in the pool and then come back." And so the man went and washed and came back. And can you imagine what's going through his mind? It's not just like, "Oh, there's the pool right there." Like, he had to go wander through Jerusalem.

I don't know if somebody took him by the hand or not, but he had to go to the pool of Salom, wash, and then come back. And when he first opens his eyes for the first time in his entire life, you can imagine he sees blinding light and he sees people. And then he sees all these things that he's only heard about all these many years. But in today's gospel lesson, it's about more than just physical sight. It's about more than just healing this physical malady. In this story, the healing of the man takes place in two verses, real short, but the whole story is 41 verses long, and we read 11 of them this morning. After this man's physical sight is restored, the neighbors start to argue.

They start to argue about whether or not he had actually been born blind in the first place. They refuse to see that this miracle has actually occurred. They'd rather be blind themselves about what's happening here than having to rethink their entire world and their place in it. And so, it's almost like they can't see the miracle that's happened right in front of them. The Pharisees, on the other hand, are a little less concerned about whether the miracle has occurred or not. Their concern is that it happened on the Sabbath. They too are unable to see that this miracle happened because they're blinded by their rules and their regulations about what is or isn't allowed to happen on the Sabbath. And then there's the blind man's parents.

They're so afraid about being kicked out of the synagogue for being followers of Jesus that they refuse to believe what's happened to their son. They say, "Well, let him speak for himself. He's an adult." they tell the Pharisees because their fear has blinded them from seeing and celebrating this miracle too. And they had probably been praying for that their entire lives. And all of this leads me to wonder, is there anyone in this story who's not been born blind in some way? By the end of the story, there's one person who does finally see it all, and that's the blind man. He's got to grow in his faith in this very short amount of time. But he comes to believe and see who Jesus truly is.

After his physical sight is restored, he's brought back to the Pharisees and they badger him with questions. Can you imagine having to stand up before a judge or somebody who's really smart kind of like a PhD person like defending their thesis? Like here's this guy who, you know, who's been born blind, probably hasn't been to school, and he's before these like theological giants and he shares just what's happened to him. He doesn't go into any big long speech. He just openly and honestly like shared what happened. And when they ask him what he thinks about Jesus, he says to them, "He's a prophet." You see, he's beginning to see. He's not quite there yet.

But later, after his own parents have abandoned him, he's brought before the Pharisees again, and they demand him to tell them that Jesus is a sinner because obviously Jesus has done things on the Sabbath that weren't things he was supposed to be doing. And so they're trying to, you know, catch him in this and they demand him to tell them that Jesus is a sinner. But his answer is this. I don't know whether or not he's a sinner. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see. But the Pharisees

do not like his answer. Of course, they kick him out of the synagogue just like they had threatened to do to his parents.

And perhaps this suffering was part of the process towards seeing who Jesus was that God can use even our most difficult experiences to help us believe in him. So this blind man who had been physically healed by Jesus has now been rejected by his family. He's now been kicked out of his community. And who's left? Jesus is still standing there before him. When Jesus had heard that the Pharisees kicked this man out of the synagogue, he returned. And we don't know why Jesus left, but we do know why he returned. To help the blind man see. Jesus says, "Do you believe in the son of man?" And the blind man says, "Well, and who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him." And by this very question, we can see that this man is ready to believe.

He's searching for answers to his questions. Sometimes I feel like our questions reveal more to us than our answers. But this man's questions reveal his humility, his openness, and a faith that we just don't see in anyone else in this story. Who is he? Who is this Jesus? And Jesus answers him, "You've seen him, and the one you are speaking to now is he." Whoa. And this man believes what Jesus says. Lord, I believe, he says. And now this man born blind can see it all. He can see what all the other people in the story missed out on seeing. He believes in Jesus. And what else can he do but turn around and worship Jesus? This calls to mind another story about a man who was sitting across the street from an artist studio.

He was a homeless man who was sitting there with his hat begging for coins or dollars and the artist saw him through the window and he thought it would make a really interesting uh portrait study of this man. And so from a distance you could see the discouraged look of this man, his downcast eyes, his almost defeated look on his face. But when the artist finished the picture, he took it over to the man so that he could look at it. And the man said, "Well, who's that?" Cuz the portrait faintly, you know, resembled him, but the person in the picture was someone who had dignity, who was sitting upright, who had a brightness in his eyes and a look that met the person in the eyes, a determined look. The beggar said to the artist, "Is that me?"

Because I don't look like that." But the artist replied, "That's the person that I see in you." It's true for the artist named Jesus, too. Jesus sees something in us before we see it in ourselves. And Jesus wants us to see our dignity, to forgive our sin, to reconcile us back to God. In other words, to help us see the things that we just can't see through our own blindness, so that we can see who we are. So that we can see who others are. and to see ourselves and them as God sees them. Amen.