



So God's Works Might Be Revealed
John 9:1-41
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Before I begin, I want to acknowledge that I am borrowing heavily from a sermon preached by Rev. Trip Porch at Indianola Presbyterian Church. I am doing so with his permission.

There are some questions that sound faithful. They sound spiritual. They even sound like the kind of questions religious people are supposed to ask. But when you sit with them long enough, you realize they're actually cruel. That's the kind of question the disciples ask at the beginning of our gospel story.

They see a man who has been blind since birth, and instead of seeing a person, they see an object lesson. "Rabbi," they ask, "who sinned? This man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

It's a question rooted in their own misguided assumptions. An assumption that human suffering must have a cause. An assumption that disability must be a punishment. An assumption that something has gone wrong, and someone must be blamed.

What's even more painful is that the disciples are not alone in this. The religious leaders, the Pharisees, make the same mistake. Even this man's own community, his neighbors, people who have seen him his entire life. Everyone seems to think they know who this man is, but it's just the small box they've put him in.

"Oh, him? He's the blind guy." The beggar. The problem. The cautionary tale.

No one seems to know his name. John the Gospel writer never tells us what it is - which seems fitting, because no one in the story is interested in knowing him beyond his disability. They stop at what they see on the surface. They reduce a whole human life down to one trait.

What a sad, incomplete reality for this man to experience at the hands of his community. To be limited and judged again and again because of something he has no control over.

As he does so often, Jesus goes against the trend. Before he heals the man's eyes, Jesus heals the conversation. He reframes it. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (John 9:3). Jesus refuses the human instinct to blame. It's as if he says, "Stop trying to explain this life away. Look again. God is already at work here."

Jesus does not treat disability as punishment. He refuses to allow suffering to be reduced to a moral failure. He refuses to flatten this man's life into a single, simple explanation.

Instead, Jesus says, Look again. There is more here than you think. God is already at work, not in spite of this man's life, but in it and through it.

Jesus won't let him be turned into a theology lesson. Jesus treats him like a human being. What if disability is not something to be fixed before God can show up? What if difference is not a defect? What if the presence of people who move through the world differently is not a problem for the kingdom of God - but a revelation of it?

After the healing, things don't get any easier for this man. In some ways, they get harder. Now he can see - but nobody seems to recognize him. His neighbors argue about whether he is even the same person. The Pharisees haul him in for questioning. Twice. They interrogate him. They bring in his parents. They look for reasons to discredit him. There is no celebration, only suspicion.

But something else happens along the way; there is another miracle in this story. The man finds his voice. The one who has spent his whole life being talked about starts talking back. Little by little, he straightens up. He argues. He testifies. He even preaches. Finally, the Pharisees have had enough of him. They throw him out.

It is there, outside the temple, outside the system and institution that has no room for him, that Jesus finds him again. He asks, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man says, "Who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe." Jesus says, "You have seen him." And the man believes.

This story is about a man receiving physical sight and spiritual insight. It also is about everyone else revealing their blindness. The disciples are blind to their assumptions. The Pharisees are blind to God's possibilities. The neighbors are blind to the fullness of the person in front of them. And if we're honest, sometimes we are too. Not intentionally. But quietly, subtly. Because we're shaped by habits and fears. Our experience in the world trains us to sort people into categories.

We can be blind to poverty that lives closer to us than we realize. Blind to the quiet realities of loneliness and depression, and addiction that people carry behind polite smiles. Blind to immigrants whose lives are reduced to political talking points instead of human stories. Blind to the gifts of people whose bodies or minds move through the world differently than our own. Sometimes our blindness looks like walking past suffering without noticing. Sometimes it looks like explaining people away with labels before we take the time to really see them.

Stella Young was a disability advocate. She died at age 32 from osteogenesis imperfecta, a genetic disorder characterized by fragile bones. She once said that one of the hardest things about living with a disability is how often people reduce you to it. In her TED talk, she pushed back against the habit of treating those with disabilities as feel-good lessons for others.¹ She said strangers would praise her for doing ordinary things, like going to school, having a job, leaving the house, as if the purpose of her existence was to be motivational for them. Stella Young was clear that she and others weren't here to be object lessons, but rather deserved to be recognized as full, complex human beings.

Those of us who generally are able-bodied can feel awkward or unsure in encounters with those with disabilities. We don't always know where to look or what to say. We wonder if we should offer help or if that might feel patronizing. We can be so aware of differences that we freeze or let the moment pass altogether. The line between "abled" and "disabled" can be thin. Being face to face with someone with a disability reminds us that our own bodies are fragile and that our own independence isn't guaranteed. When we feel that awkward vulnerability ourselves, we may look away. Which is its own kind of blindness.

Truly welcoming difference is not easy. It is easier to build a world that only works for the people who fit neatly into it. It is easier to value efficiency over belonging.

But the kingdom of God has never been about efficiency. It is expansive, disruptive. It stretches us. Every time someone new is fully welcomed, our understanding of God grows wider.

¹ https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much?subtitle=en

Congregations across the country show us this. When members who are blind join the community, leaders and worship teams reimagine services that once relied heavily on slides, images, and printed materials. They rethink scripture, hymns, and announcements. They describe images aloud and adapt materials. At first these changes may slow familiar routines, but over time congregations discover something unexpected: when they make worship accessible to those who cannot see, they enrich it for everyone.

When we look closely, this is what a wider vision of the kingdom of heaven looks like. People who are differently abled are beloved children of God - bearers of wisdom in their own right. When we welcome difference, communities can be reshaped, and God's work becomes visible in new ways.

Maybe the question our gospel story asks us is not, "Are we blind?" But "How are we blind?" Who have we been missing? And where might Jesus be standing right now, just outside our field of vision, inviting us to see more? Because Jesus is always moving toward the margins. Always expanding the circle. Always revealing God's work in places we aren't looking.

Maybe the deepest healing this story offers is not to the man born blind, but to everyone else. Healing from the fear of difference. Healing from the lie that some people matter less. Healing from the illusion that we already see clearly.

God's works are being revealed all around us, in this time, in this place. In bodies that move differently. In minds that think differently. In lives that refuse to fit our categories. The question is not whether God is at work. The question is how might Jesus be expanding our sight right now?

May God give us courage to see. May God give us humility to learn. And may God open our eyes to the beautiful, diverse tapestry of humanity, where even now God's works are being revealed. Amen.