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Sermon Scripture: John 9: 1-41

Sermon Title: Opening Our Eyes to Jesus

John 9

9 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. 4 We[a] must work the works of him who sent me[b] while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, 7 saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is

someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.” 10 But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” 11 He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” 12 They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” 16 Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. 17 So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19 and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” 20 His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, 21 but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus[c] to be the Messiah[d] would be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” 25 He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One

thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” 26 They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” 27 He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” 28 Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” 30 The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” 34 They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”[e] 36 He answered, “And who is he, sir?[f] Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” 37 Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” 38 He said, “Lord,[g] I believe.” And he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.” 40 Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” 41 Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

Prayer...

Introduction:

This morning we are exploring the story of Jesus healing the man born blind. Many scholars of John’s Gospel find this to be one of the

more well crafted stories within John's Gospel. It is also a story that builds on the I AM Statement we spoke about in chapter 8, where Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." The story of Jesus healing the blind man is a literal example of Jesus bringing light and in this case sight to someone's world.

As a reminder the summary of the story is that Jesus sees a blind man while walking and the disciples ask him who sinned to cause the man's blindness. In the culture of Jesus' day, it was common to think disability was somehow tied to sin. Jesus thankfully says that sin was not the cause of the man's blindness at all. Rather Jesus indicates that this man's blindness would be an opportunity for God's works to be revealed in him. Then Jesus spits on the ground and makes some mud. Then he puts it on the man's eyes. Some suggest this was a medicinal remedy that was known in Jesus' day for eyesight problems. Then Jesus directs the man to go to the pool of Siloam. The word Siloam actually means sent or sent one as in a

missionary. The play on words is interesting since this man washes his eyes and is healed. Then he is sent out to share the message of Jesus and his healing power.

After the healing, this man become a tool for the pharisees again to try and trap Jesus. The pharisees are upset that this man is healed on the sabbath. They also initially doubt that a miracle has happened until they talk to the man's parents. They affirm that the man was healed of blindness, but the parents of the man are afraid of being thrown out of the synagogue, so they encourage the religious leaders to talk to their son directly. The healed man is spoken to again and he defends the one who healed him. The healed man is a bit incredulous with the pharisees when they seem to suggest that Jesus is not from God. Here is the rebuttal of the healed man. He says, ““Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who

worships him and obeys his will. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.

33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

Do you see here that the man who opens his eyes by the healing of Jesus is also able to see fully that Jesus is truly the Messiah. The Pharisees stubbornly still refuse to appreciate Jesus even though they clearly have proof of a miracle.

Our story finishes with Jesus seeking out the healed man who has been driven out by the religious leaders . When Jesus asks if the healed man believes in him. The man says, “Lord I believe.” And then he worships Jesus. The metaphor of blindness is now placed on the pharisees. The religious leaders are the ones who cannot see their own sin. They remain blind to the truth of Jesus and to their own sin.

What might we learn from this well-crafted story? I think this story is both a wake up call for us and an invitation to follow Jesus with the confidence of the man who is healed. We are invited in this story to

see Jesus and to follow him and truly see the world around us as well.

What is the wake-up call in this story? I think this story reminds us to not be like the pharisees, who remain blind despite seeing a miracle.

The pharisees pretend they are without sin and that the blind man even after his own healing is full of sin. The pharisees cannot see clearly.

How often do we think we see clearly, but instead we miss the presence of Jesus in our world. I confess that is easy for me to look at our human experience and gravitate toward critique of God and others. There are reasons to be frustrated by the pain and suffering of our world, but sometimes we miss the love and goodness that exist. I know I can also get caught up in critical feelings toward folks who think differently from me. We see it often in political conversation, but also related to theological ideas between churches and different religious groups. It is easy to go through each

day focusing on that which divides people. It is harder to look for common causes that bring people together.

My favorite rock band U2 apparently is getting ready for a world tour. I have not looked into tickets yet, but maybe I will try to go. I saw U2 twice in concert in 1987, the famous Joshua Tree tour. What I loved about Bono and the entire band was the way they sang songs that brought out honest reflection on humanity, genuine spiritual insights, the value of social justice, and the importance of unity. The name of the band U2 invites a connection with the band, where unity is fostered as everyone experiences the spiritual awe of one of their concerts. One of my favorite songs of U2 is called “In the Name of Love.” In this song Bono offers a tribute to Martin Luther King Jr and Jesus who both showed love and brought unity. The chorus goes like this, “In the name of love, what more in the name of love. In the name of Love, what more in the name of love.”

On this World Communion Sunday, I long for the Christian Church and really the whole world of spiritually centered people to join together for a movement of love, compassion, and justice. I long for a world that worships Jesus like the healed person in our story and then shares the message of God's love with the whole world.

On a Sunday like today we normally are reminded about mission efforts locally and globally. I am grateful one of our mission partners is here with us, Brian and Julie. The mission we are called to do together is the spreading of Jesus love to the world. I define Jesus love as the love that seeks to lift up a sister or brother in need, a love that has no barriers, a love that seeks out the vulnerable just like Jesus sought out the healed man and revealed himself as Lord and Messiah.

We need more Jesus love and less judgment. We need more unity and less division. We need justice and compassion that focuses

less on naming other peoples sins and blindness, while acknowledging more where we fall short.

Seeking to bring unity is not an invitation to pull back on our convictions. Rather it is a call to love well while sharing our values with others. Our session here at Newberg First Presbyterian Church recently met and started a conversation about how we might live out our values as a congregation more clearly in Newberg. We are exploring how we might support the work of the Presbyterian Church USA with its emphasis on love and justice concerns. As we continue our stewardship season in October, we are invited as a church to recommit ourselves to the mission of showing Jesus to the world. Our church is uniquely placed in Newberg to represent the heart of Christ for immigrants and refugees and the call to bring peacemaking to the forefront in Newberg through our Peace Garden mission efforts. Our monthly retreats invite a flow of both inward prayer and solitude and active compassion in our town and world. In

a few weeks we are going to launch a new website that will reflect our commitment as peacemakers who bring grace, hope, peace, and love to our community.

Our story today invites us to open our eyes to Jesus and to open our eyes to the world around us. We need to be honest about our own sins, so that we stay in a posture of humility. And we need like the healed man to share the good news of how our life with Jesus guides us to live in a more hopeful way, where our priorities are to care for vulnerable people and creation and where we cultivate a love relationship with Jesus that changes the ways we live and how we see others.

I think Jesus comes and seeks us out, just like he did with the healed man. Jesus is asking us whether we believe in him and whether we are willing to share his light to the world. Jesus will first with compassion meet us in our need, but then he calls us to bring his message of love to others. Let us follow Jesus who is the light of the

world and let us join with Christians and others around the world in a spirit of communion and unity that truly brings peace, shalom, healing and wholeness.

Today after worship, we are celebrating the 90th birthday of Carol Swehla. I just want to share a shout out to Carol, who with her whole family embodies what it mean to have open eyes to Jesus and and open heart for the world around. Through her life as a teacher and follower of Jesus she has embodied Jesus love very well in our world. Carol, we look forward to celebrating you more today and we as a congregation continue to commit ourselves to sharing Christ's light together in unity.

Let us pray....