

Today we'll give a lot of attention to the story that we've been assigned by the lectionary; we'll read the whole text, which is all of **John 9**. It's largely the story of a man, probably a younger man, since his parents figure in the story and life spans were shorter then. The man is unnamed and so is simply referred to as the "man who had been born blind". It's unusual in the Gospels because of the amount of space given to one character, mostly in the absence of Jesus. So I want us to focus on this person's story, what happens to him and how he responds.

We can treat this narrative like a play with 6 scenes. Here in this first scene, the principle character, who is later described as a beggar, is fairly passive. If you can, put yourself in his place and imagine what he might have been experiencing in this little interaction.

*Scene #1 As he (Jesus) walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned. But in order that God's works might be revealed in him, we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> Given that I am in the world, I am the light of the world." <sup>6</sup> 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, <sup>7</sup> saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent).*

*Scene #2 Then he went and washed and came back able to see. <sup>8</sup> 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?" <sup>9</sup> Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am he!" <sup>10</sup> But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" <sup>11</sup> 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." <sup>12</sup> They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I don't know."*

A blind man "who used to sit and beg."  
What do you imagine he's like? (--bitter? -compliant?)  
and,  
what did he experience when what we've just read happened to him?

How did he respond to Jesus' touch—and the mud? --and to Jesus' command?

(Jesus leaves the action.)  
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What's going on here?  
Where's the joy?  
Why the confusion?  
(Opportunity for man to show assertiveness and prove reliability—as a witness)

The blind man is assertive: "I am he!" –takes the role of Jesus (for the writer, see 8:58).

**Scene #3** <sup>13</sup> Then they led the man who had been born blind to the Pharisees. <sup>14</sup> Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, I washed it off and now I see—that’s all!” <sup>16</sup> Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. <sup>17</sup> 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.”

**Scene #4** <sup>18</sup> 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 <sup>19</sup> and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” <sup>20</sup> His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; <sup>21</sup> 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.” <sup>22</sup> His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. <sup>23</sup> Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

Ah—*Sabbath*! explains the Pharisees’ interest.

What else?

Is the man “protecting Jesus?”

(Doesn’t give Jesus’ name, short answer to not put responsibility for healing “work” on Jesus.)

What do “you” say? (Here is opportunity to denounce Jesus & proclaim his own innocence; --he doesn’t.)

“Prophet” -- the best guess he can make—and defy the Pharisees. (Is he gaining courage?)

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What is relation between son & parents? (No joy over healing? Guilt over making him beg? Fear of authorities stronger than love of son?)

Don’t know “who opened his eyes”. Really? (Apparently they fear any association with Jesus, knowing that could jeopardize their status in the synagogue.)

**Scene #5** <sup>24</sup> So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know this man is a sinner.” <sup>25</sup> He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” <sup>26</sup> They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” <sup>27</sup> 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?” <sup>28</sup> Then they insulted him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. <sup>29</sup> We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we don’t even know where he comes from.” <sup>30</sup> The man answered, “This is incredible, because you don’t know where he comes from, even though he opened my eyes! <sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners. God listens to anyone who is devout and does God’s will. <sup>32</sup> Nobody has ever heard of anyone opening the eyes of a person born blind. <sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” <sup>34</sup> They answered him, “You were born entirely in sin, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

**Scene #6** <sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” <sup>36</sup> He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” <sup>37</sup> Jesus said, “You have now seen him. In fact, he is the one speaking with you.” <sup>38</sup> He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

**Epilogue** <sup>39</sup> 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.” <sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” <sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

Can’t deny healing, so Pharisees seek to condemn healer. What observations about the man who was healed?

Resists denouncing Jesus.

Resorts to candor (“I already told you”) and then sarcasm (“you want to be his disciples?”) and indignation (“this is incredible”).

Blind beggar “outsmarts” legal scholars!--and suffers for it.

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(Jesus re-enters.)  
Observations?

How did he understand “son of man”? (humble or exalted or “who is he?”)

“believe in” = trust? or “see”?

“worshipped him” – a beggar’s supplication is fulfilled.

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“so that, those who think they see, recognize their blindness”

blind=no sin (see vs.2)

is believing “seeing”?

So what are the learnings from this story? I was drawn to this story by the progression of transformation portrayed in the healed blind man. True, we don't know his basic character, but he's pictured at the start as a "blind beggar". From that largely passive and dependent posture, he becomes increasingly alive and (self-)confident, even assertive, especially in dialogue with the Pharisees, whom he dares to challenge and offend—and get kicked out of the synagogue!

Commentary suggests that the Gospel writer has intentionally drawn parallels between the blind man and Jesus—in his similar claim "I am he" (vs.9) to Jesus' "before Abraham was, I am" (8:59) and "I am the light of the world" (vs.5); also in their similar conflicts with the Pharisees: blunt confrontation, use of logic and sarcasm, accused of being a sinner, and of trying to teach with authority.

More profoundly, I am struck by what we call the "healing" of the blind man: what happens is so much deeper than simply returning a person to former health. Our quests for healing are often seeking a return to "wellness"—to "get better" like we were before. Jesus cured a royal official's son, he raised a little girl to life; he made them like they were before—even the sick man by the pool in John 5, after 38 years, was "made well".

But the blind man in John 9 had never been able to see, so his healing is not a return to something, but a moving toward something new—wholeness. It has a deeper quality than just eyesight. It's vision, insight, maybe imagination; and these capacities generate belief, faith, trust, courage, risk-taking. When the man actually encounters Jesus, he's ready to entrust his life to the "Son of Man", whom he doesn't even know!—but about whom he has "seen" something that draws him.

According to John 9, one part of Jesus' reason for coming into the world is to bring this kind of healing—that the blind might see: not just eyesight but the deeper transformation of vision that yields belief. But the other part of Jesus' mission is that "those who see may become blind" (9:39)—a little startling? The Pharisees who hear Jesus say this are indignant—"you're not saying we're blind, are you?" Actually, that is exactly what Jesus is saying. And he's saying it so that they might recognize their blindness and, like the blind beggar, be healed and begin the journey of transformation.

Betty Pries in The Space Between Us talks of entrenchment, in situations of conflict: the deep entrapment in my own “blindness”, especially when it’s part of the system I live in. In some measure I have been able to recognize my blindness with respect to the white privilege and power that I’m entrenched in. But there are other powers that I wield and misuse or that dominate and use me, which I am still largely blind to.

In this story in John 9 we see the liberation of one man from the grip of blindness and the deepening immersion of others in darkness. But there is hope here: if blindness can be healed in one, surely the healing is available to all. And there is One sent by God explicitly to bring light, to be light, so that those who do not see, may see!