

John 9 sermon “Where is the mud; where is the pool?”

Have you ever had a dramatic encounter in a group that had you talking about it and thinking about it for days, maybe weeks later? If you were present in the village where this healing of a blind man happened, I’m pretty sure this is one you would be talking about long after it happened. Trying to make sense of it. Trying to figure out what actually happened and sorting out fact from fiction.

The drama of the story of the man born blind invites us to enter into it. Now this will require some use of your imagination today and the ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes.

You’ve heard the story presented to us by the Reader’s Theater group. Which character do you identify with most? Most of us like to identify with the underdog, or the good guys. It’s human nature to do that. But as I describe my imagination of each character, listen for what resonates, maybe even what irritates. It could be an invitation.

**The disciples**, who have been traveling with Jesus for some time now and have seen some things and learned some things. And who want to show their cleverness in asking Jesus what seems like an astute theological question as they walk by a blind man.

**The blind man**, who has suffered isolation, judgment and so many limitations because of his blindness. Who’s lived in the darkness of blindness all his life. Who has never seen the sun, the trees, the people he loves. Who wasn’t protected under disability laws like we have today.

**The blind man's parents**, who have lived in shame at bearing a blind son, wondering if they are to blame, but loving him, wanting to protect him and themselves from being cast out of their synagogue, which was the only faith community available to them. The parents are protectors and worriers. Maybe you identify with them.

**The crowd**, who recognize him as the man born blind, but not quite sure how it makes sense that he now sees. And is it really him? You're filled with more questions than answers.

**The Pharisees**, who were proud of their advanced understanding of their religion, the experts who people looked up to, who they trusted to protect them from dangerous elements, like this Jesus and his ragamuffin band. I think the Pharisees get a really bad rap, especially in the Gospel of John. Now we know that the Gospel of John was written at a time when tensions between Jesus' followers, Rome and the Pharisees were at an all-time high and so whether such incidents as this were really this vitriolic or remembered through the filter of current tensions, we don't know. So you have to take some of this with a grain of salt.

I think Jesus theologically was actually not all that different from the Pharisees and they played an important role in society in those days. Especially for us seminary-trained persons, we need to exercise a whole lot of caution and empathy because we are the so-called experts now. We are the leaders who people look to and trust. Imagining yourself in the role of a Pharisee does not make you a bad person!

**Jesus.** It might seem a bit presumptuous to imagine you are Jesus, but just remember, this is just a way to enter the story, not claim equality with God.

**Jesus**, the non-anxious Presence in the group, the one who sees **the man**, (not just his blindness) and responds with compassion. And with no small measure of courage in facing his critics.

Hopefully now you've chosen one character that resonates with you and you will imagine yourself in their shoes. Please ask yourself the question as we go through this--How do you experience this story from that person's vantage point and how do you experience Jesus responding to you in this story?

If you're one of the **disciples**, what do you learn when Jesus says sin isn't the cause of his blindness, but it's an opportunity to show God's goodness and glory in his life? Do you wish you would have been more interested in the man's healing than in getting your theological question answered?

If you're the **blind man**, what's it like to not expect or even ask to be healed and then all of a sudden this guy spreads mud on your eyes, tells you to go wash and just like that, you're eyes are opened and you see for the first time! Life as you know it is about to change!

IF you're a part of the **crowd**, imagine your wonder, your amazement but also your confusion. How can this be? And who's this guy who did it? And it's the Sabbath so is something about to go down with the Pharisees?

If you're the **man's parents**, the sheer joy at your beloved son being able to see! Do you know what this means for him, for us? Maybe people will stop looking sideways at us, judging us for being sinners. But oh no, here come the Pharisees and it looks like trouble.

The **Pharisees** have a point to make. They don't trust this new guy who's making some pretty audacious claims. And healing on the Sabbath? Doesn't he know we have rules about that?!? Who does he think he is, waltzing into our town and acting like he can do whatever he wants?

And **Jesus**, Jesus does not back down. He does the Lord's work on the Lord's Day and is ready to rumble with the Pharisees, (not for the first time).

Picking up where we left off, the verbal battle ensues. There are questions and they need answered!

The blind man knows one thing—he couldn't see and now he can. The how's, the why's and the wherefore's he may not know, but he knows he can see. Imagine his delight in posing ironic questions back to the Pharisees. He turns the interrogation on its head when he questions their own faithfulness and lack of ability to understand and perceive. But he's still tossed out of the synagogue.

Same for the parents. They try to be as careful as they can, not to get caught in the Pharisees' trap, but there's really no winning against them and they got tossed out too.

As it seems the story is winding down, we see what Jesus is all about. He wants to heal people and show the generosity and compassion of the Creator God, which seems totally consistent with Sabbath, the day we set aside to worship, focus on our relationship with God and our community and rest in the grace and goodness of God. When Jesus hears about all the drama the blind man and his parents have been through, he again prioritizes the formerly blind man's experience. He finds him and checks in with him. And the blind man gets a faith question, "Do you believe in the Son of Humanity?"

If you're imagining that you're the blind man, maybe you don't know exactly what Jesus means by this, but you know that this man has healed you and that he is special so you answer with your heart, "Yes, Lord, I believe!"

The Pharisees overhear this. Still feeling defensive, they challenge Jesus directly and want to know if he means them when he says that people who think they see are actually blind. They are so deeply tied into their narrative of who they are, who God is and who has control and authority around here, that they simply can't be healed, but apparently will continue in spiritual blindness.

The Disciples question about the nature of sin and judgment doesn't seem so bad. Whereas the Pharisees' question comes from a place of disbelief, a place of looking for evidence against Jesus, and an unwillingness to accept the grace of God that was right in front of them. Do we sometimes miss the grace of God that's right in front of us because we're stuck in our disbelief, in our assumptions about people and because we're more interested in justifying our narrative than being challenged to expand our thinking?

What are the gifts, the healing, the restoration that Jesus would offer us if He were standing in front of us right now?

How do we turn from the darkness of disbelief and disillusionment to the light of God's grace among us?

Where is the mud that Jesus might smear on our eyes?

Where is the pool of Siloam where we might be washed and freed to see what God is doing?

Pregnant pause

Just a few chapters before this story in John 5 we have the story of the lame man who Jesus asked, “do you want to be healed?”

How many times are we actually fairly content in our misery and don't say yes to Jesus' offer of healing? Because then what was in the dark will be revealed in the light?

In this story Jesus does not ask the blind man whether he wants to be healed, but after all is said and done, he asks, “do you believe?” And you remember from a couple weeks ago that believing in Jesus is like believing in the bungee cord to do something for you which you can do for yourself when you go bungee jumping. Do you affirm that Jesus is the Son of God who has taken on human flesh and is also the Son of Humanity and is here to save, heal, and restore sight to the blind?

Do we believe that Jesus is still saving, healing and restoring sight to the blind?

As you imagined yourself in this story, what insight did you gain? How did you perceive the grace of God in Jesus right in front of you? What needs healing in your life—disbelief, being stuck in your own narrative, fear, spiritual blindness, physical ailments?

In this story, Jesus says that this man isn't blind because of sin, but says that the blindness is there so that God's work will be revealed in that man. Jesus demonstrates what he means when he says that he is the light of the world--His compassion, his courage to face conflict, his wisdom and his healing power—lights up the world of those who are touched by it.

But that's not where it ends. Jesus invites his disciples into the work of this mission. “While it's daytime, **we** must do the works of Him who sent me.”

We. You and me. All of us together. With Jesus. Following the Light of the world, and called to be the light of world, we let our light shine. And the darkness will not overcome it.

But where is the mud and where is the pool? What do we need from Jesus and each other to be healed, to be restored, and to join Jesus in his mission as the light of the world?