

## JESUS HEALS A MAN BORN BLIND

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

A sermon preached by the Rev. Theodore S. Atkinson  
Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA

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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Imagine what it would be like to be *born* blind. Would we have an instinct to see like a baby instinctively longs for milk? When people spoke of beautiful colors would we find their talk strangely irrational or would it awaken in us a desire to experience something lacking in our lives? And if our blind eyes were suddenly opened would we immediately be able to distinguish a person from a tree or bird? Now most of us can see but imagine explaining *color* to a person born blind? We have to explain in terms of touch, smell, taste and sound. For example, we might say the color *blue* is like the feel of velvet, the smell of lilacs, the sound of a gentle stream. This might give us an idea of how hard it is to describe God to someone blind to God.

Why are some people unable to see God *anywhere* whereas others see God *everywhere*?

That's what I want to talk about this morning. Take a look at the diagram in your bulletin. Some people see a duck; others see a rabbit. If you see a duck, I can't force you to see a rabbit. I can, however, help you look at the picture a new way. I can say, "Try to see the duck's bill as the rabbit's ears." Years ago, Thomas Kuhn wrote a book entitled, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. He claimed that scientific progress comes when people see something old in a new way. For example, for centuries people saw the *earth* as the center of the universe but Copernicus suggested looking at the *sun* as the center of the solar system with the earth as a satellite. Because he dared to see the world in a different way he opened our eyes to see whole new worlds. In a similar way, Christians can help others see God in unexpected places. For we see a man eating & drinking, blessing children, working on Sunday, talking with women. For example, many people look at innocent suffering and see only the absence of God. Christians

look at innocent suffering on the Cross and see God redeeming a rebellious world he loves and has destined to save.

The Gospels talk about people who were unable to see God. They were unable to see God eating and drinking with sinners, taking children on his knee, caring about women; or working on the Sabbath. Today's Gospel lesson tells the story of a blind man healed by Jesus on the Sabbath. But the people who were really blind were those who were unable to see God even when they were staring <sup>him</sup> right in his face. Jesus saw a man blind. People asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Jesus doesn't explain evil. He destroys evil. Jesus anointed the man's eyes with mud made from spit and sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam. Any reasonable man would say, "This is stupid" but the man obeys and gets healed. But nobody said, "Praise the Lord, you've been healed!" Rather they said, "This is wrong. God can't heal on the Sabbath. How's this possible?" The healed man repeatedly says, "Jesus healed me!" "Who's Jesus? Where is he?" they asked. "We don't see him." And the blind man simply says, "I don't know where he is - I've never seen him. All I know is I was blind and now I see."

Watch how the blind man's faith grows. At the beginning he knows nothing about Jesus except his name. For all he knows Jesus may be a sinner. Later he sees Jesus as a prophet. Only at the end, long after he was healed, he sees Jesus as the Messiah and worships him.

Notice one final thing. Jesus sees the blind man long before the man sees Jesus. Jesus *finds* the blind man even though there's no evidence the blind man was looking for Jesus. Jesus heard about his trouble with the religious leaders and begins looking for him. What a joy it was for me to see as a young man that God sees me long before I see God and that God found me even when I wasn't looking for God. When Jesus finds the healed man he asks, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man responds, "Who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."

Jesus said to him, "You have seen him (even without recognizing him), and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worships Jesus.

We Presbyterians talk a lot about seeking God. And that's good. We ought to seek God. We encourage a seeking faith. But despite our searching we often feel lost. Our searching doesn't seem to give us answers; rather it raises more questions. Sometimes we give up searching for God. Sometimes, like Adam in the Garden of Eden, we're more likely to hide from God than seek him. But the Gospel proclaims a God who sees us when we can't see him; who searches for us when we are actually hiding from God; hiding from God but secretly hoping to be found by God.

Stasi is a married woman in her forties. She remembers something that took place when she was about five years old. She was home playing hide-and-seek with her brothers and sisters. She found a perfect place in a closet. She snuggled up behind some winter coats and waited for someone to find her. An hour went by and still nobody found her. In fact, everybody had stopped playing while Stasi remained hidden. No one noticed she hadn't been found. No one looked for her. Her experience was the defining moment of her life. Being the youngest in her family, Stasi always got lost in the shuffle. Her dad traveled a lot and when he was home he spent most of his time in front of the TV. An older brother and sister were always getting into trouble in their teens and got all the attention of her parents. Stasi wanted attention from mother and father and brothers and sisters but felt she never got it. She grew up feeling like that little girl hiding in the closet. She learned to hide well. She hid her desires. She hid her dreams. She hid her heart. She became an adult and her worst fear was -- nobody's looking for me; if they are, they'll never find me. And if they find me they probably won't like what they see? She feared that she'd never be loved. But one day a man named John found her. And he saw her to

be more beautiful than she ever saw herself (Wild at Heart, John Eldridge). I believe all of us want to be found by One who loves us unconditionally and sees in us beauty we can't see in ourselves.

The Gospel tells the story of a God who sees blind people; who see us when we can't see him; who searches for us, when we aren't looking for him. Glen Tinder has a friend who lives out west. He often takes long hikes alone into the Sierra foothills. Mountain lions live where he hikes. Mountain lions are mysterious, mystical, creatures. They're elusive and almost never seen. They rarely attack people but they're large predatory cats capable of swiftly killing large animals. They also possess great beauty and grace. Tinder once asked his friend, "Have you ever seen a mountain lion?" "No" he said, "but I've often hiked into a mountain canyon early in the morning. I return in the late afternoon and I've found mountain lion tracks near my own.

Then I know a mountain lion has been watching me - even though I've never seen one." (Tinder, *Birth of a Troubled Conscience*)

I've never seen God. A lot of times I haven't even been looking for God. But when I look back on my life, I see God's tracks. I believe if you look in the right way you'll see signs of God's presence in the most unexpected places. Whether or not we're looking for God or can see God, God sees us. God is tracking us down – not like a mountain lion – but like a shepherd in search of lost sheep, like a woman in search of a lost coin, like a father watching for his prodigal child.

Gracious God, Give us purity of heart that enables us to see you. Our eyes are so often dim, so that we can't see signs of your presence. You alone can open blind eyes, cleanse our impure hearts and enable us to see you in Jesus. This we pray through Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit, reign over the entire universe, One God, forever and ever. Amen.