

## **Seeing the Path**

Lenten Journey: Part 4 "Seeing the Path"

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – March 19, 2023

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent

**Readings:** John 9:1-41

**Reflection:** Psalm 23

**Greeting:** Come, let us go to the house of our God. So that he may teach us his ways. And may we walk in God's paths. Come, let us walk by the light of the Lord! (*Isaiah 2:3-5*)

**Prayer:** Lord, we ask for your guidance in these forty days. May you help us to prepare our hearts and lives to be transformed by your steadfast love. Be gracious to all who have strayed from your ways like lost sheep, and return us to the fold of your mercy. Help us as we journey with our Savior to know your truth and grace. May we be moved by your Spirit that we may join together to humbly worship you. We pray that you will strengthen us by faith that we may walk in your light and may share your good news with joyful and glad hearts as we celebrate our deliverance from slavery to sin and death through the sacrifice of your Son our Savior. And it is in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 23

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long. (Psalm 23 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 23 and we hear of God's protection. That God is with us even in the darkest of times. That we can find comfort in the presence of the Lord. What comfort do you find in knowing God is with you? How do you share that comfort with others? Can you think of a time when you were thankful that you knew you walked with Christ? How can you share that assurance with others? How has your heart and life been changed because of Christ? How can you share Christ with others in this season of preparation?

**Prayer:** O God, help us to remember your great compassion for your people as shown to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. May you help us to prepare to have our hearts and lives be changed through your mercy and grace. May your steadfast love inspire and strengthen us in these forty days. It is with penitent and grateful hearts that we come before to share our joys and our concerns on this day. We ask that you lift us up in both our laughter and our tears so that we may know your compassion. May you bless us in both our celebrations and our

sorrows so that we may know that you are always with us, and may we always be thankful for your faithfulness as shown through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **Sermon:**

Our scripture reading for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our reading for today comes from John chapter 9 verse 1 through verse 41.

*As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so 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. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 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, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 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?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am he." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 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." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 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." 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. 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." 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 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, 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." 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. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 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." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 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?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins,*

*and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. 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." Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains. (John 9:1-41 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week we talk about seeing the path ahead. To do so, we follow Jesus into Jerusalem. He and the disciples are here for the festival and will be leaving soon. But while Jesus is there, he comes across this man who has been blind since birth. And we get a rather interesting question to start today's reading. Jesus' disciples want to know if it was this man who sinned or his parents that sinned for him to be born blind. I think it is important for us to note that Jesus says it was neither. This idea upends quite a lot of thinking at the time. The problem here is that it's thought that for this man to be born blind that either he sinned, which seems pretty incredible that he did something before birth to be born blind, or more likely that his parents sinned to cause him to be born blind. Jesus says that this isn't the case and that the whole concept is wrong. However, his blindness can become an instrument to demonstrate God's works. This also plays into the idea we often have that "everything happens for a reason." And the reason here was supposed to be someone's sin. But Jesus is saying that something good can come of this, but that there is no fault for it. That it was nobody's action that caused this man to be born blind, but his blindness can be used to glorify God. I think it's important to start with that distinction because it changes the way that we see God compared to the way that the Pharisees, the religious experts, would have expected this to play out.

So, Jesus sees this man and he spits on the ground to make mud with the saliva, puts it on this guy's eyes and tells him to go wash. He comes back able to see and people can't believe that it's him. They can't believe that this is the same man that would sit and beg. They think that maybe it is just someone like him but not really him, because there's no way he could have been healed. They want to know how this has happened. He explains that Jesus healed him, but he has no idea where he is now. So, they bring him to the religious experts. And we run into a problem that happens quite a bit throughout the Gospels. One of the faults that they have is that Jesus did this on the Sabbath. If he made mud, he was working. If he healed somebody he was working and that is for bidden. Because of that, some of the Pharisees claim that Jesus can't be from God because he doesn't observe the Sabbath. But this raises a problem. If he's not from God, then how did he heal someone born blind? This causes a rift because they're not sure what to think. They don't really want to say that Jesus is not from God but is performing miracles that should belong to God. But they don't want to say something is from God if he's ignoring the Sabbath. That is part of the conflict that they have in trying to figure out how to handle the situation. They asked the man who was healed what he thinks, and he thinks Jesus is a prophet.

Now there's something here that I have to make a note of because of the way that John was written. It can skew our view here, so I wanted to address it now to clear up any problems. One of the things that it says in our reading is that "The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight," and the wording here can cause some confusion. Mostly because everyone in the story would consider themselves to be Jewish. However, it is likely that when John was written, that his community was already considered distinctly separate from the Jewish community, likely not by their own choice. This is reflected in the way things are worded. Though Jesus and his followers are also Jewish, they are often set apart in John's Gospel. So, in a story where every character is Jewish, the distinction from John is almost always that "the Jews" are the Jewish people opposing Jesus only. This retro-active classification can warp our view, because we can easily forget that this is an internal struggle within a faith, and helps us to forget that everyone here in this reading is Jewish. I bring this to our attention so that we faithfully and truthfully understand John's writing. Most frequently, when John mentions "the Jews" he is talking about the religious experts and authorities among the Jewish people. That they're the ones who don't believe that this man had been blind and received sight. That they don't understand how this Jewish man was healed in a way that would work with Jewish law.

At this point they call for the man's parents. His parents don't seem to want to have anything to do with this situation. They don't want to get in trouble. They certainly don't want to be involved in the controversy. So, they say that they know their son, and that is their son. They know he was born blind, but they have no idea what happened to make him see. Also, he's a grown man and could answer for himself. They very much seem to not want to have anything to do with this problem, even if it is their own son. So, this man is seemingly on his own. In what shouldn't be a joyous moment he is left defending himself. What should be a celebration of the miraculous becomes a major contention because of power. Here he is trying to answer for how it is that he was miraculously healed. He was blind, and now he can see and that's all he knows. It is here that the man who used to be blind starts to grate on the nerves of the religious experts. The Pharisees want to know how this has happened. They want to know how Jesus opened this man's eyes because they are convinced Jesus is a sinner. Instead the man suggests that they want to become Jesus' followers. This really upsets the Pharisees because they say they're disciples of Moses. They don't know where this Jesus has come from. And here our friend born blind gets into more trouble, because he notices how ridiculous the situation is. He says that God wasn't going to do the will of a sinner, so Jesus can't be a sinner himself. Nobody has ever healed blindness that had been present from birth, so he must be from God. How else would he do what he's done if he's not from God? And here we can see anger and I would even say bigotry come to the surface. Because they tell him that he was born entirely in sin, so how dare he try to teach the Pharisees! And with that they drive him out. They were never interested in the miracle from God, they were interested in what it meant for them.

I think that they got tired of him speaking the truth of his situation, because it didn't fit for the story they wanted to tell. If you want to upset someone who thinks they know everything,

point out where they have been foolish. Those who hold a very high opinion of themselves will always react angrily when their own ignorance is shown. That is what happens here. The Pharisees treated this man so poorly because they already thought he was beneath them. If he was born blind, there was no reason they should listen anyway. So, they drive him out, not wanting to be made fools anymore. They've already judged him for themselves. Now, in contrast, Jesus hears about this and seeks the man out. When he finds him, he asks if he believes in the Son of Man. The man who was healed says that he wants to know who that is so he can believe. Jesus tells him that he is speaking with him now, and he believes. Jesus then flips the status-quo on its head. Those who do not see will see, and those who do see will become blind. This is another thing that Pharisees don't want to hear. And the few that are in hearing distance of this object, saying they aren't blind. Jesus tells them because they have claimed sight, their sin remains.

This is another statement that is much like "the first will be last, and the last will be first." So, what is Jesus trying to say here? The man who had no sight from birth is healed by the Messiah, and now that he has seen the light, he believes. But the Pharisees, who should be able to see it all, are blinded by their own arrogance. Pride has caused them to not see God in action. Because they are trying to make God fit within the picture they've painted. Because they are trying to make sure that God remains exactly who they want God to be. Not the God who heals a blind man out of love. Not a God who heals those who are in need out of a great mercy. They want a God who is just as small and petty as they are, one that is more worried about breaking the Sabbath than healing the broken. I think that's one of the main takeaways from this account. Because the healing is a very small section of it. Almost all of our reading today was about the response. There's anger over healing. That if people aren't made well on the terms that we decide then they haven't been made well at all. The Pharisees see this healed man still as someone who was born completely in sin and shouldn't be able to say anything to anyone. They see him as a freak, because he can see when it shouldn't be possible at all. I would hazard to say that they see it as an affront to God that someone would heal this man because they don't want him to be made well. Because either it was never sin that caused him to be blind, and they have to deal with a change to how they view God, or just as much of an affront, God could forgive something that was so heinous that it caused a man to become born blind and let him be healed. It means God is much more forgiving than they want God to be. And I think this is timely because we still see this today. Because we still see people that don't want to see people be healed in a way that shows God's great love and mercy if it means they can't keep God as petty as they are. It is an affront to some people that some lowly person might encounter God in a way that doesn't fit with the way they imagined God. The problem is that God is bigger than us. God is so much bigger than you and me that we can only just barely begin to understand the depths of God's love and grace.

So, we have to understand that if God's mercy is for all people, we have to be ready for God's glory to shine through in new ways. We have to be ready for God's glory to be shown through the way that God heals people, sometimes in surprising and unexpected ways. And God is often trying to find ways to break through to our stubborn hearts to show us how great

his love is, ultimately breaking through with the love demonstrated through Christ's death and resurrection. God is trying to let us see the path. So, I pray that as we continue to engage scripture during the season of preparation that we look for the ways that God upends our expectations. That we see that ways that God shows a love and a mercy greater than we ever anticipated. That we see the way that God reaches out to us to overcome our need to judge, our need to be right, and our self-righteousness so that we can understand true righteousness. And that as we explore the scriptures, that the Holy Spirit guide us and lead us to an even greater love and understanding through Jesus Christ our Lord. That we may all see the path in a spirit of love, a spirit of forgiveness, and a spirit of acceptance of all God's people. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Lenten Journey**

Our current series is a journey through Lent. Each week we have a story of Jesus that helps us as we prepare ourselves during Lent. As we travel through these forty days with Christ, we learn important lessons along the way.

February 26th – *To the Wilderness* – Matthew 3:13-4:17

March 5th – *Meeting by Night* – John 3:1-17

March 12th – *Going to the Well* – John 4:5-42

March 19th – *Seeing the Path* – John 9:1-41

March 26th – *Visiting Friends* – John 11:1-45

## **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Our Healthcare Workers	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Phyllis Gabel	Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter	Phil Hawickhorst
Ray Carr	Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Steve Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Family of Kyle Lehman	Corrine Howard	Stacy Janes	Don Gilmore
Shirley Jester	Connie Brown	Jack Pitcher	Family of Alberta Darling
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Lavon Figgins		

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

[cdstmichael@outlook.com](mailto:cdstmichael@outlook.com)

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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