

"Come and See"  
Sermon by Oby Ballinger  
Transfiguration Sunday  
Edina Morningside Community Church; February 11, 2018

**John 9:1-41**

As [Jesus] 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 the man." 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." But 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, and 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 near 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.

A company called [Second Sight](#) has been working for years on technology that gives sight to the blind. The model they are testing has cameras implanted in a pair of glasses. Images are then wirelessly broadcast to a receiver that's implanted in the surface of the eye, which sends them through the retina to the brain. Those who once were blind are now able to see—well enough to go skiing, take up archery, and move around at will.

Jesus did not have electronic cameras and implants. All he had was spit, dirt, and the pool of Siloam. But with those everyday things, he creates a miracle even more astounding than modern science. He gives a blind beggar not only new sight, but also a whole new life.

The beggar, though, might quickly have wished for his old life back. No sooner is he given sight than he is suddenly called to explain himself before one group of people after another. The neighbors around don't recognize him. They are used to passing him by every day, hearing him call out for money or help. Now who is this stranger before them, seeing and talking with them as an equal? They argue among themselves over whether he is the same man as the beggar they knew before. "How were you healed?" they ask. "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and sent me to wash in the pool of Siloam."

Does that count as a *real* healing? There was no magic incantation, no offering of fatted calves, no heroic pleas to God. Surely a miracle of this magnitude needed something more extraordinary than mud. Unsatisfied with the man's answers, his neighbors take him to the Pharisees. It's here that the real inquisition starts. The Pharisees ask him question after question, putting him under the hot light. They are like police detectives you see on TV—asking the same things again and again, on the lookout for answers that change. "*Where* were you? *What* did he do? *How* did he heal you?" They want to make sure that the man is not a charlatan, a fake.

The miracle's simplicity is what's unbelievable to the Pharisees. It was done with nothing more than spit and dirt, not even prayer. And it was done on the Sabbath, no less. This is just not how healings are supposed to take place. Healings come from them, the religious establishment. As for Jesus: "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." The Pharisees become more heated, angry with the man who is healed. Finally, when they cannot get the answer they want, they shout him down. "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" Then the Pharisees drive the man out of the synagogue.

The Pharisees are unable to see the healing for the good miracle that it is. Instead, they focus on the ways it transgresses their assumptions about God, and about the way the world works. God's grace and healing have not come through the proper channels. By the end of the story, Jesus tells us who is really blind. It's the Pharisees, the religious authorities, those who claimed knowledge, who presumed to "see."

There is a word of warning for us here if we presume to know how God will act. How God's grace will be manifest in the world. Like as not, God will do the exact opposite of our expectations, and leave us scratching our heads to explain. This is a common theme throughout the Bible. God is always at work in the ways, people and places where we least expect it.

At work in the most common means, through spit and dirt, for example. I can think of a lot more dignified ways to be healed. But that's what Jesus has on hand. And Jesus will use anything, absolutely anything, to heal. His compassion for those in need means that everything is fair game. He uses whatever is available, even spit and dirt. No surgery or implants required.

If Christ will use everyday things to make a blind man see, then what will he do with everyday people like you and me? I have had my doubts about the power of any church to truly heal folks in our community, not to mention the world. In our midst, we have people who cannot find jobs, whose searches for a medical cure are still unrealized, whose hospital bills are through the roof, and whose bodies have so many weak parts that patches don't seem to work any more. In the face of all the need around us, who are we to take part in the healing of the world? But the power is not with us—it belongs to Jesus.

And as the story of the blind man's healing shows us, Jesus likes using ordinary things (and people) for extraordinary healing.

Take our weekly offerings, for example. The people who gather here give modest and sacrificial amounts every week, and we seldom realize how much is made possible through them. We may think that our gifts are not so much, five, ten, twenty dollars, more if we're able. Loose coins that we receive and pass on to other community partners each month. The gift of our time, making ourselves available to one another each Sunday. Our talents and time shared in other meaningful ways throughout the week. These are the everyday offerings that we participate in today.

All by themselves, such gifts of time, talent and treasure may seem to be small things. Not much when compared with all the suffering of the world. But what happens in this church, and in other churches like it throughout the world, transforms the face of the earth. It may not seem like much, but it's all God needs. This is the spit and dirt that Jesus uses today to heal people who are blind and broken. Looking from the outside, from the vantage point of those who are powerful in this world, these may look like mere trifles. Our actions may invite question and challenge. "There is no way that your little drops of money will make a difference in an ocean of need." Like the blind man once healed, we will face our own skeptics and doubters. Perhaps even from inside our own heads. But the good news of faith today is that by God's power in Jesus Christ we can be healed of blindness by surprisingly small things. And we can be instruments of God's healing for the blindness and misery of others. Because Christ is in our midst, with spit and dirt. Thanks be to God. Amen.