John 9:1-41

Spiritual sight

John 9 contains one of the best told stories in the Bible, I think. When you read it, you sense that you are there. You see Jesus walking down the road, and the disciples asking him questions. They pass a man who is blind and ask him whose fault it was that the man was blind. You can see some of the similarities and differences from ourselves immediately. Like us, we seek to lay the blame on someone. Unlike us, they believe it has to be either the man or his parents. Where would we place the blame. On society? On God?

In any case, Jesus heals the man of his blindness “so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” It’s not his fault, or his parents’ fault. It is an opportunity to see God at work in the particular needs of this man. It is a reminder that needs are great around us at all times, and we only have limited opportunities to “work the works” of the God who sent Jesus.

So the first point: what works of God are you blind to? How can we bring God’s light to others?

This man’s healing by Jesus is a seven-day wonder. His neighbors and acquaintances ask one another what had happened. He kept saying it was he, himself, who had been healed. So great was the change in him! Eventually, the religious leaders get involved, worried that this act of love and kindness was done perhaps for the right reason but in the wrong way. They get into a religious dispute, and even his parents get involved. He stays radically honest in his answers: he tells what he knows and what he believes, but tells no lies. He tells “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” They ask him if Jesus is a sinner—and he replies that he doesn’t know the answer one way or the other. But he knows this: once once was lost, but now is found, was blind, but now he sees. Eventually, the leaders get so angry that they drive him out.

And this is the second point: Like this man, we should be clear and honest about our spiritual walk when we discuss it with others. It does us no good, and others no good, to tell white lies about our spiritual life. If you have doubts, share them. If you love God, tell others. If you were disappointed in how a prayer was answered, don’t go out of your way to hide your disappointment. If you want to be “drunk with poetry and virtue,” don’t hide it. In general, people will respect and like you for your honesty and transparency about your spiritual life, just as they are about your work or school life, or about your emotional life, or whatever.

Of course, sometimes people will get mad, and drive you away. When this happened to the man who was no longer blind, Jesus sought him out. And this is the third point: Jesus will seek you out, too, when you are hurt and rejected. Welcome him in.

I think that Jesus completes the cycle as he seeks out this man. At first, he was just a blind man beside the road. Then, the disciples wanted to turn him into a theological debating point. But Jesus engages with the man, and his healing comes as a sign to the disciples, the religious leaders, and his community that Jesus is doing the works of his Father. And now, Jesus seeks out the man directly, and brings him what we can only call a gospel question: Did he believe that God’s prophet, the Son of Man, would come. And the man’s honest question is return: I don’t know who that is, but I think you can tell me. And Jesus’s honest, direct answer: He was the Son of Man, the one who was to come, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ. And then the man’s simple, heartfelt response, “Lord, I believe,” and then to worship Jesus.

Lord, I believe you are the Son of Man. Lord, I trust you. Lord, I have faith that you are who you say you are. Lord, I will follow you and obey you. You are the hope of my life.

And so, the fourth point: Jesus calls use to the same kind of belief. And you ready today to see God’s work in your life? Are you ready to respond with belief and trust when God acts?

Jesus says he came to give sight to those who are spiritually blind, and to take away the sight of those who think they think they spiritually see. Jesus raises the humble up, and brings down the proud. Just when we think we have got it all figured out, Jesus comes to remind us—sometimes gently, sometimes not so gently—that we’re not quite as far advanced as might think we are. And so this is another cycle: of growth and decay, of two steps forward and one step back, of spiritual refreshment and spiritual admonishment.

But Jesus still comes to us after we have been driven out, to call us to do the works of God, to live honestly before God and other people, to welcome him, to trust and believe in him.

Do you believe in the Son of Man? The one we have been talking about is he.