

Amazing Grace

Lent Worship Series

Week 3: The Blind Man

Sermon

- The **Sermon**, “Grace for the Blind,” is delivered by the pastor (P) as narrator and another reader (R) as the Blind Man, who is wearing dark glasses:

P One of the longest narratives we have in the gospels tells the story of a man whom Jesus healed from blindness. This man’s story compels us to look more closely at our own stories of blindness in fear, and how we too come to trust the healing grace that Jesus brings for our lives and for the lives of all people everywhere.

The contrast in this story is between seeing and being blind, between living in the light as opposed to walking in darkness. When we are blind, we are mired in the darkness of our unbelief and fear. But believing in Jesus means seeing with eyes of faith, trusting his healing grace which sets us free to confess him as Lord over all the threats of fear and death. Seeing is believing.

Jesus’ own disciples were themselves blind to the very need of the man born blind, focusing their attention only on his sin. They assumed that if he was blind, perhaps he or his parents did something wrong to bring about this illness. While we generally don’t make that strong a connection between sickness and sin, nevertheless, like these disciples, we too often make critical judgments about other people’s struggles in life. We are less aware of how such critical judgments point only to our own blindness and sin toward others.

This blindness is our Lenten confession. We are blind to the multitude of sins from what we do or from what we leave undone. We can only confess that we are blind sinners in need of

God's gracious mercy and sight. God is merciful to those who confess this blindness of sin, giving them the sight, the faith, that makes them well through Christ.

Jesus sees this moment of encounter with a person in blindness not as an occasion for judgment, but as an occasion for shining God's amazing grace upon those in darkness. The blind person did not even ask for this grace that Jesus gives. But he clearly does become the beneficiary of that grace. And as his story progresses, he will see and believe how this moment of encounter links him with Christ's promise forever.

R I am the man.

P The blind man's first confession is to make public that he is, indeed, the same blind beggar who used to sit on the street. Luther said, on his deathbed, "We are all beggars." Yet how many of us are inclined to point out this mortifying truth of our own spiritual poverty.

The people before whom the man formerly blind makes his confession had trouble recognizing him. Isn't that also our own problem? Our failure to recognize and accept others? There is so much that divides us from people. Fear, not faith, controls our lives and keeps us from this recognition and acceptance. We fail to see how so many others in our world live with many of the same kinds of struggles and fears that haunt our own lives. We are blind to all of this. Moreover, we cannot seem to move beyond this blindness, let alone have a clue as to where to find the healing that we so desperately need.

But grace comes to us through Jesus the Christ, even without our asking, freeing us to confess before others the truth of our beggarly blind lives, and to grasp the promise that we may now stand up before others and confess publicly, "I am the man." I am the person who has been so blind in life, unable to recognize anyone, even as I am unrecognizable. But grace has nonetheless come to my life in all the truth of my being a blind beggar.

R 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.

P The man now makes his confession even more clear to those who are still blind and still walk in darkness. His reason for seeing, from being called out of the darkness into the light, is credited to the "man called Jesus" who touched his life with healing and washed away his darkness. They will be forever linked.

In our own baptism, we receive this washing away of sin and guilt, of blindness and darkness. We come to this new vision that through Christ we may be enough to make not only the confession of what is already sinfully true in our own lives, but also the joy of faith and new life we get through Christ. We once walked in darkness and sin, but now we get to live in the newness of light and grace in Christ. Our lives are forever linked with Jesus the Christ.

R I do not know.

P Seeing is believing. Seeing is trusting. Faith and trust means grasping the promise and grace that is less tangible to the naked eye.

Where is the One who healed you? The man is given a forum to confess his faith, but in his weakness he only says what he does not know.

But a much bolder witness will eventually be called forth from this man soon enough. He will face his time of trial, not only before the public, but before the religious authorities. Jesus encouraged us to pray that we may be spared this critical ordeal. “Save us from the time of trial.” But times of trial, when they come, can also be times for confessing. And confessing our faith means confessing what we do know—that Jesus the Christ and his gospel of grace is the good news for all who are blind and ensnared in fear and judgment! Indeed, we may even become bold enough to assert that our own healed and forgiven lives through Christ are already living proof of God’s amazing grace.

R He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.

P So the man who was formerly blind is brought to trial. When they asked for details on how the healing took place, the man confirmed what he had already said on public record.

But the authorities seemed less concerned with the healing of this man than with the fact that his healing took place on a sabbath. In fact, these authorities in their blindness insisted that to be healed on a sabbath was an act that made Jesus a sinner in their eyes. But some of them were able to see and uphold the miracle of God’s grace and healing.

Notice how this man’s testimony, as brief as it is, leads to a division of the house. This division is not a result of the act of this man or his healing. What they are divided about now is whether or not Jesus the Christ is an agent of God’s grace and healing. Their division is about the very gospel itself!

In their blindness, they are afraid that their own law may be overturned by this gospel of grace. Indeed, they pressed the man to witness to his faith. “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” Even they notice that he and Jesus are forever linked.

R He is a prophet.

P Saying that Jesus is a prophet is hardly the boldest confession of faith. Many people may affirm that Jesus was a prophet. But he is so much more than that. He is the one who overcomes the blindness and darkness of our age, and gives us the faithful sight and grace in God’s mercy. As this man’s trial progresses, so will his faith deepen as he becomes bolder in denouncing that darkness and embrace more firmly the light of Christ.

But for the moment, the trial now turns to the parents of the man. They ask him, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" The parents do not even have the faith or courage of their son to face this time of trial. Nor do they affirm their son's testimony. They say, "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." They lived in the fear that anyone who confessed Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, would be put out of the synagogue. And being cast out of religious life meant also being cast out of social life as a scandal. But their fear already leads them to deny their own son and to treat him as a scandal.

Who wants that label of scandal attached to their lives? We will find our answer to that question very soon, even as the authorities again call the man who had been blind to testify a second time. They say, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." The man now offers a bolder witness to his faith.

R I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.

P Notice, now, how the scandal is now put on its head. The man does not denounce the scandal of his own life, that he had been blind. Consider that blindness as a confession of the truth of our blind sinfulness. But he adds, "Now I see." He will not put any distance between himself and Jesus who is regarded as a scandalous sinner. Indeed, when Jesus associates with scandals like us, he takes that scandal of our sins upon himself as his very own. The cross is sometimes called a "stumbling block," a "scandal" to those who are too blind to see its merits for our good. But Jesus accepts the curse of his death on the cross in order to heal the lives of all of us who are blind in our sins, giving us instead the grace of his healing and love. Jesus and the man, even in all scandal, are forever linked.

The blind authorities cannot understand. They thrash about in their darkness, repeating questions that the man had already answered earlier. "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

R 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?'

P This confession now puts the authorities on the stand: testify to your source, your grounding. And so they do. "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." They choose the law. But that only leads us further to fear in the blindness of our sin. The law always accuses us, telling us what we are not. But even in this accusation, it may also point us to the gospel of grace, where the law is finally overcome! The man who has regained his sight, whose faith shines the bright light in this moment, stands on this solid ground of this gospel of God's grace in Jesus the Christ, even as he witnesses one last time before these legalistic au-

thorities.

R 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.

P The boldness of this man will not be silenced, for his answer is too good to go unspoken. But these blind authorities cannot see the light of his answer. Instead, they denounce him, just as they did Jesus, in their final judgment. “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they cast him out.

But even in being cast out, this man is forever linked with Jesus. He stands unafraid, filled with the promise of faithful sight. He trusts that his real appeal is to an authority much greater than all these secular authorities. His faithful appeal is to the authority of God in Jesus the Christ.

Fear is conquered when we place our trust in Jesus and his cross. Indeed, this trial was never really about this man who was formerly blind, but about Jesus the Christ and his amazing grace. This grace of Christ holds this man firm. Christ will be with him always, not only in this moment, but in all the moments of his life. Even cast out, we are not alone, for Jesus was cast out upon the cross and is with us still to grace us in his mercy.

“Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man will answer.

R And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.

P Jesus will answer, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” And this man follows with his firmest confession of faith in Jesus the Christ.

R Lord, I believe.

P Lord, I believe. Lord, through the faith that you have brought me from being a blind beggar to one who is healed in your grace. Lord, you have given me the courage to stand up and witness to your grace. Lord, you have comforted me that even when all others cast me aside and deny me, you are still with me. Lord, you have freed me now to stand with all who are cast aside in this world blinded by sin and fear.

Seeing is believing.

Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” The critical authorities who founded their lives on the law think of themselves more nobly than they should. They say, “Surely we are not blind, are

we?” But Jesus responds, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see’, your sin remains.” But confessing our darkness and blindness means turning to the grace of Jesus’ healing and light.

Lent is a time for us to confess the truth of our blindness and fear, how it has limited us to be agents of grace and mercy to so many. But Lent is also a time for us to confess the grace that we have indeed received in Jesus the Christ to overcome our fear, and to face any and all obstacles. Our lives are forever linked with Jesus.

So with the confessor of this story, we, too, say, “I was blind, but now I see!” Seeing is believing. Darkness gives way to Christ’s own magnificent light!