

# A Sermon for DaySpring

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**“I Once Was Blind”**

John 9: 1-41

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In 1986, Fred Craddock (great preacher and teacher of preachers) was visiting in Jerusalem and he made a trip to the Wailing Wall, that last vestige of the great temple.

As he walked up to the wall, he couldn't help but notice, right off, these folks in a fight... trading punches and rolling in the dirt. He found out from some bystanders that these were two groups of Rabbinic students and that the fight had started over the issue of when the Sabbath actually begins.

One group said it begins when the sun goes down. The other said it begins when the evening star appears. The debate had soured into conflict and now they were rolling in the dirt and fighting.

Craddock said, **“I was standing there, and there was this women shopping near me.**

**She turned to me and said, “Are you an American?”**

**“Yes ma'am.”**

**Are you a Christian?”**

**“Yes ma'am.”**

**“Well, I guess you can see why Jesus never had a prayer in this town.”**

One day, about 2000 years before – in that town, as Jesus went along... he saw a man who'd been blind from birth. Maybe the man could hear that Jesus was passing near... probably lots of bits of conversation filtering through his sensitive ears.

**“There's Jesus over there.”**

**“Almost stoned him yesterday... can't believe he's back.**

**“I wonder what he'll do next?”**

You can tell, if you're blind, when a group of folks... full of conversation... full of questions... is moving your way.

**“Who caused this man's blindness... was it his sin... his parents?”** Someone had to ask it... This instinctive theology that just never seems to die. If something bad happens, there's a skeleton in someone's closet. **“Job, we know you wouldn't be in this spot if you weren't hiding some secret... better come clean.”**

The notion that we get what's coming to us... dies a slow death... and it was as popular then as ever ... so someone asked, **“Is he blind because he's bad?”**

He heard it, don't you think... like he had a million times before. He's the object lesson... and doesn't himself know whether he's good or bad... but in this moment, I suspect he's all ears.

And he hears Jesus say, **“Neither... But in order that the works of God might be displayed in him, we must work the works of Him who sent me as long as it is day.”**

The man, born blind from birth, leans forward. Jesus hasn't labeled him as sinful and his blindness as a symptom of it... and he's talking about doing the work of God... what's next?

**“CChhhccchhht,”** that's what he hears. Jesus spits on the ground. Enough to make some mud... **“Cchhhccchhht.”** That's the sound.

And the reaction is, “here we go again.” People had put mud in his eyes a million times. It was a common physician's remedy... “here's mud in your eye.” It had never worked before and he hadn't asked for it.

I suspect he's thinking, **“that's all you got, Jesus?”**

**“Nope... now go wash this off in the Pool of Siloam.”** Well... that's a little different. But not all that different... it was one of those special places in town... Maybe thought of to have some life-giving qualities... like a hot springs in Arkansas.

But he goes, with what faith he has. **“May as well... this is, after all, Jesus, and Jesus is possibly the real deal.”** Forgive me if I’m reading too much of me into the text... but he goes to the pool with a mixture of faith and cynicism...

belief and unbelief.

He goes with nothing to lose.

With at least some curiosity.

And in the going participates in his own healing. Wades into Siloam’s waters... splashes some water... or does he immerse himself? And... comes up seeing.

It’s a big deal, huh... He’s walking around stunned and the community is stunned... **“Who did this... and how?”**

**“That man, Jesus, did it. He said, ‘here’s mud in your eye, go wash...’ and I did, and I’m 20/20.”**

And they took the guy to church... to the synagogue... Of course, the Pharisees will want to know and give thanks.

Or will they? John says, **“Now the day on which this all took place was the Sabbath.”**

Great... did you know that physicians can’t heal on the Sabbath? It’s considered work. They couldn’t practice their craft, which of course, included... specifically in the Sabbath Code... **no putting mud in the eye of a blind guy...** it’s spelled out in the Sabbath rulebook.

“Jesus... are you trying to get in trouble?”

“Do you want to tick them off?”

“Couldn’t this have waited a day?”

Guess not... because night is coming when no one can work. And... **“yes... some people need to be ticked off.”**

Well, now the Pharisees have a real conundrum. It’s goes like this.

1. We know that sinners can’t do the work of God.
2. We know that people who break the Sabbath laws, and break them on purpose, are sinners.
3. That means that Jesus couldn’t have healed this guy.

**“What do you say, it was your eyes he opened?”**

**“Well... I think the guy’s a prophet.”** That’s interesting... a page before it was, **“That man, Jesus...”** now it’s **“He’s a prophet.”** Some thing’s happening to him... Interesting, I think.

But not to the Pharisees... It doesn’t fit... they’ve all learned the equation about the work of God and who can do it and it just doesn’t square. Well, they go back and review.

**“Okay... one, we know sinners can’t do the work of God. Two, people who break the Sabbath rules are sinners... Three, that means Jesus couldn’t have healed this guy.”**

**“That’s it,”** they all said in unison, so relieved, **“He wasn’t really blind.”** **“Get his parents in here...”** **“Yes, let’s talk to his parents... we’ll clear this right up.”**

**“What to you say, mom, dad... he wasn’t really born blind, now was he?”**

They look around... slowly... all the big shots are there. Leaders in the synagogue... smart... powerful... ready to kick you out of the synagogue if you say you’re a Christ follower... better be careful with the answer.

**“Umm... well... he is our son...”** **“Yes,”** dad echoed, **“He’s our son alright.”**

**“And, ummm, it’s like they say... blind as a bat when he was born.”** **“Couldn’t see a lick,”** dad chimed in again.

**“But as for how he can see now... and who did that... you’ll have to ask him.”** **“Yeah,”** dad agreed, enthusiastically, **“Ask him, he’s a grown up and he can speak for himself.”**

Well, the facts are still all pointing to an authentic, bonafide, work-of-God kind of healing... But... still there's the equation. Sinners can't heal, Sabbath breaking is sinful; that equals no work of God. That's what the rules say.

**"Bring that guy back in here."** They do... **"We know this man's a sinner... give God the glory for your healing. Quit lying. We have an equation... if you really were healed, Jesus couldn't have done it. He broke Sabbath rule number 643, which states clearly, 'You shall not spit on the ground, make mud, and put it on blind eyes.' Quit lying and give glory to God."**

**"Look,"** he said... obviously irritated by now... **"I don't know about all your theology as to who's a sinner or not... but I know this, I once was blind, but now I see."** (and someone listening said, sounds like a great line for a hymn... better write that down)

I like that, by the way... **"What's most true is that which is most transforming."** Aquinas said, **"If it's true, it's of the Spirit."** Wherever we find truth... life... healing... we better be looking around for God.

Might be in an AA meeting...

Or from some non-church-going neighbor.

Or in someone who your religion has previously said was on the outside.

Or maybe in a Sabbath-breaking preacher.

If there's life and healing there... God is there.

But not for these guys... And they can't stand it... It doesn't fit... **"How, how did he do this?"** They're like little children who don't want to hear something... covering their ears.

**"Jesus healed me."**

**"No he didn't... la, la, la, la, 'Onward Christian soldiers'... la, la, la."**

**"Tell us what he really did."**

And the guy has absolutely had it... gets sarcastic even. **"What... so you can become his disciples, too... is that why you want to hear it again?"**

Uh oh... he crossed a line there... **"We're disciples of Moses... we don't even know where this guy is from."**

**"Well, I do,"** he says. And using words that John loves... **"he's from God."** That's interesting. We've gone from... **"The man, Jesus"** to **"he's a prophet"** to **"he's from God."**

He's moving one way in his awareness and ability to see. And they're moving the other. It's so hard... seeing. There's such a force field around the small mind. We see what we want to see... are taught to see... told to see... expect to see (Mayers, 89)

Remember The War of the Worlds and the panic it caused? Orson Wells' play is being read over the air about an attack from outer space. In one small town... men ran outside and filled their town water tower (which looked to them very much like a flying saucer) with buck shot... It's still there, I understand, riddled with holes, created by anxiety, a testimony of how hard it is to see once you've been told what to see.

"What is at odds," Gregory Mayers says, "cannot be seen." (Mayers) There is within us all a kind of deep, instinctual resistance to moving beyond what we know in our minds to be "true." And this instinct is no respecter of persons. This is not simply a trait of right-wingers... it's all of us... look right and left ... and then look in the mirror. Because we all do this.

We have to... we can't live in the world without nailing some things down, you know. We need to identify patterns... rules... guidelines... structures... doctrines. We must communicate those to one another and lift up the standard. We need to affirm what has been revealed and known.

It's impossible to live without boundary and structure and to have some things settled. When I go into restaurants, I just always get the same things because I hate having to make up my mind with every choice in the menu as an option.

We need to have some things settled. They help us see, at first. Like fingers pointing to the moon... But they can also blind us... because, of course, we tend to start staring at them and not the moon.

Then, we can't see. Then we're blind but don't know it and that's really dangerous. Thinking we see and we're seeing nothing.

Apparently, we have to be blind first. Aquinas said, **“The highest knowledge of God was to know that you don't know God.”**

Jesus says at the end of this story, **“I came into this world... so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”**

And some Pharisees heard him say it... They all weren't shooting the water tower with buckshot. They heard... and they said... **“Are we blind... is it possible that all our knowing... all our assurance... has blinded us?”**

I like these guys... It's easy to see everyone else's blindness. **“Look at those rational liberals over there... they're so stuck in their modern, Newtonian, world view.”**

**“And look at those mean fundamentalists over there. Dumb legalists... it's no wonder Jesus never had a prayer with the likes of them.”**

The question of course, this morning is ... does he have a prayer with me? Can Jesus... living Lord and walking parable that he is... get inside me and open my eyes? ... Does he stand a chance with me... with our church... in this town?

I don't know... but I hope so... It's not easy. Seeing what's real. Seeing the truth, humbly seeing ourselves. We fight it with everything... it's not easy. And there is risk. So it makes us nervous when someone comes in from the outside and says, **“the emperor is wearing no clothes.”**

Our tendency is to expel this voice. It happened to Jesus and to this man born blind, now seeing 20/20.

They threw him out and yelled at him, **“You were full of sin at birth.”** Reminding him again of that prevailing thinking.

(And I just have to ask... don't you think that theology might have died a long time ago if theologians had to take a turn in the church nursery once a month? Try holding a baby... look into its eyes and say, **“you're full of sin.”** Nursery rotations would fix our anthropology.)

But... they'd never been in the nursery rotation... so they threw him out... Which isn't just prepositional... physical. Nor just social... like they “withdrew fellowship”... churched him. It's spiritual... outside the presence of God.

And here's my favorite line of the entire story. **“Jesus heard that they had thrown him out... and when he found him...”** He heard... and he went looking.

Folks... it's hard turning loose of what we know... of our certainty. There are risks involved. We may find ourselves exiled from all we've known.

But never from God.

God in Christ,

comes looking for us,

when we take the risk to see something new.

**“When he found him... Jesus said to him, do you believe in the Son of Man?”**

And the guy answered, **“Just show me where he is.”**

**“You're looking at him.”**

And the man said, **“Lord, I believe, and worshipped him.”** And that is interesting. He goes from, **“the man, Jesus”** to **“the prophet”** to **“one sent from God”** to **“Lord.”** He worships him... he's divine.

Something happens between us and God... a progression takes place, when we let go... of all the idols... of our blindness... of our control and certainty... when we let go of our fingers pointing to the moon... of our absolutes... Then, we find ourselves with the Absolute and we bow...

And we say, **“I once was blind... but now I see.”**