

A few years ago, there was a Christian song out on the radio called “Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord.” It’s based on this Bible verse: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which (God) has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in his holy people.” -Ephesians 1:18 (NIV) This verse along with our Gospel lesson serves as the text for this morning’s message.

Imagine being blind. I don’t think you and I can *truly* imagine what that’s like. Unless you’ve felt it, you probably have no idea. The closest I have ever come to being blind is when I had surgery on both my eyes when I was nine years old and had to wear gauze bandages over them for a whole day and a half. It was such a relief when the doctor took them off and I could see more than just those fuzzy white gauze bandages!

This morning, we’re going to see how Jesus healed a man that had been blind not just for a short time but for his entire *life*. And as we look at this story, it’s going to become clear that this is also your story and mine- Jesus has healed you and me, but from a different *kind* of blindness. Jesus literally changes the way this man saw the world, and He’s done the same for us.

So, Jesus and His disciples were walking along, and they saw a blind man begging on the side of the street. They didn’t have welfare or disability back then, so if you were unable to work, you were often forced onto the street to beg. The disciples asked Jesus a question when they saw that blind man- “Who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” It was a common belief back then, that if someone was born with a disability, it was a punishment from God. ‘Whose fault is it that this man was born without the ability to see?’, the disciples were wondering.

Jesus answered that it was *no one’s* fault. Look at the reason Jesus gave for this man’s birth defect: “This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” God was going to do something *special* in this man’s life, something *big*, something out of the ordinary- and being born blind was part of God’s plan. And that’s a good thing for us to keep in mind today as we come into contact with people who might have a disability- why are they born that way? We don’t always know. But sometimes, God lets those things happen so that He can do something special, something out of the ordinary, in that person’s life and in the life of those around them.

That was the case for this man here. Notice how Jesus connects this situation with His outlook on life: “As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him Who sent Me. Night is coming when no one can work.” In other words,

Jesus was telling His disciples that He wasn't going to procrastinate when it came to doing the work of the Heavenly Father. The time to deal with this blind man and to reveal the glory of God was right now- they weren't going to go out to lunch and afterwards have a meeting to decide what to do about that blind man. The time to act was now. Jesus told His disciples, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Jesus here is giving a hint of what He's going to do for that blind man. 'I am the Light of the world. For those living in darkness, for those that are blind- I'm going to do something for them- I'm going to be their Light.'

Then He spit on the ground, made some mud, put the mud on the blind man's eyes, and told Him to go and wash in one of the public pools that you would see around the city back then. And when the man did that, He was able to see for the first time in His life. Can you imagine what that must have been like for that man? He could finally see what *people* looked like, what food looked like, colors, the sky, water, himself. All these things he knew about but could never see-now he could. Some things probably surprised him- how beautiful some things looked, that he had never seen before. And maybe there were a few things that he could now see that weren't so pretty- things like crime or disease. His eyes were opened to the world by the *Light* of the world.

But there was something else Jesus wanted to do for this man. You see, the eyes on his face were now opened. But the eyes of this man's heart were still sealed shut. But not for long. Today's Gospel reading goes on to describe how the religious leaders of that day were *spiritually* blind. The eyes on their face were working, but the eyes of their heart, that is their spiritual eyes, were sealed tight. Those religious leaders interviewed the man who had been healed by Jesus, and the interview did not go well. They didn't think Jesus could possibly be connected to God, because He had healed a man on the Sabbath. They asked this man what *he* thought, and the man replied: "He is a prophet".

With their frustration growing the Pharisees then went and interrogated the man's parents, but they still couldn't see it. So, the Pharisees went back and questioned the man *again*, but he held firmly to his belief that Jesus was connected with God. The Pharisees were so spiritually blind that they finally said to the man, "You were steeped in sin at birth. How dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out."

And now we see Jesus perform the *big* miracle here- He opens the eyes of the man's heart. Jesus found the man and asked him if he believed in the Son of Man. "Tell me who he is," he said. Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact,

He is the one speaking with you.” And then in verse 38 comes the **real** miracle in this story- “The man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped Him.” He became a believer. In contrast to the spiritually blind Pharisees, the eyes of that man’s heart were opened wide by Jesus. And when he saw Jesus, he didn’t see just a prophet, or a man with a connection to God. With his brand-new eyes of faith, he saw Jesus for who He really is- God’s Son, the Savior of the world. And that’s when he bowed down and worshipped Him.

After Jesus healed the man, He said that is why He had come into the world- so that the blind will see- in other words, so that He could give eyes of faith to those whose souls are spiritually blind. Jesus also came to cause some to become blind. In other words, for those who think they know everything and keep rejecting the Word of God over and over again- for them, Jesus has come to make them even more blind.

Do you see how this man’s story is **our** story? Did you know that you were born into this world with your spiritual eyes sealed shut? You were born spiritually blind. You couldn’t see Who Jesus Christ was. And when you can’t see Jesus, you can’t really see Who God is. And when you can’t see God, lots of things don’t make sense in this world. Why am I here? What is my purpose for existing? Where am I going? And what will happen to me fifty or a hundred years from now, when I’m not here? When you can’t see Jesus Christ, you can’t see answers to these questions. Spiritually, that is how we were born. We couldn’t see what it is we needed to see about God in order to have life- true spiritual and eternal life. And unless someone intervenes, we would all have wandered aimlessly into hell, condemned and separated from God for all eternity.

But Jesus didn’t let that happen to you. He intervened. What Jesus did for this man in our Gospel lesson, Jesus has also done for you. He came to you, and He opened the eyes of your heart. He didn’t use mud. For most of you, Jesus opened the eyes of your heart when He came to you in your Baptism. There, through water and the Word, Jesus gave you eyes of faith, so that you could see Him, so that you could see God and understand and believe all these things that you had never seen or understood before. For some of you, Jesus gave spiritual sight to you when you were older- and He came to you through His powerful Word and opened your eyes with the message of the Gospel. I forgive you, Jesus said. I died for you. I rose for you. You are my child, and I will be your Shepherd. That’s the Gospel- and that’s how Jesus has opened your eyes to things about God you had never seen before.

Like that man in the story, Jesus has opened up a whole new world to you. With eyes of faith, you now can see that all of your sins have been taken away by the Light of the world. With eyes of faith, you now can see that you have been completely and totally forgiven by God, for all the mistakes you have made in life. With eyes of faith, you can now see you are guaranteed eternal life. Jesus has taken away your blindness and has given you eyes of faith. Now you can see you have an important purpose in life. You can see and believe that your loving God works out all things for your good. Now you can see that even the bad things that happen in life, aren't punishments for sin- Jesus has already been punished for your sins. No, those bad things in life are opportunities for God to display His glory, just as He did for this man in this text. Jesus has cured you of your spiritual blindness. Jesus has given to you a new heart with 20/20 vision- a whole new world of faith has been opened up to you.

Treasure the spiritual sight that God has given to you. Don't take it for granted. Reach out to those who are blind. Who knows, maybe through you, Christ will heal another blind soul. Amen.