

2 March 2008
Lent 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Learning About Seeing From a Blind Man”

Text: John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39 (Eph 5:8-14; Is 42:14-21)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

What good is having **eyes** if you look at what should not be seen and fill your mind with filth of all kinds?

What good is having **ears** if you use them to drink in gossip and delight in dirt about your neighbor?

What good is having **hands** if we use them to harm, to take for myself at my brother's expense, or to choke the life of others by my own greediness and selfishness?

What good is having a **tongue** if we use it to destroy a reputation, betray a confidence, lie, or hurt another with harsh and biting words?

What good is having a **heart** if you desire what is not good? If you desire what is not God?

The Scripture readings that we heard today are about much more than Jesus giving sight to a man born blind. They are about you and me and how we see ourselves. They are about you and me and how we use the gifts that God has given us. They are about you and me, *that we who see might not become blind* – but continue to *fix our eyes on Jesus*. (Gradual)

For if I see my neighbor in need but do not help, am I not as good as blind? Am I not worse than blind?

It is a great warning that Jesus gives us today, that we do well to heed. When in the culmination of this story He says, “*For judgment I came into this world, that those who do*

not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” Where are you in those words?

Jesus spoke those words about the Pharisees. Religious guys. Good folk! Pious. Learned. They knew their Torah inside and out. They were very zealous and dedicated. **And they saw so much they became blind.** They saw so much the sin in others that they became blind to the sin in themselves. They stared so long and hard at their own piety that they became blind to the good in others. They knew the words of their Bibles so much that they forgot what those words meant. And so when Jesus came along – the very fulfillment of those Scriptures, and the One they should have been waiting for and excited to see – *they were blind.* They could not see what was standing right before their faces.

Has it happened also to us? Do we so see the sin in others that we’re blind to the sin in ourselves? Are we so proud of our own piety that no one else can measure up? Do we know the words of Scripture but forgotten what they mean? Has our religion become a tool instead of faith and love? Those are tough questions. Traps so easy to fall into.

So let us learn a thing or two from the blind man today. While every one else is fighting over him – the disciples want to know why, and the Pharisees are upset that this happened on the Sabbath – **the blind man teaches us about faith.** Faith that doesn’t ask why, but trusts. Faith that hears the Word of God and keeps it. Faith that receives the gift of God without any merit or worthiness in me, and relies on the mercy of our Saviour. And not just *this* blind man, but *all* the blind men in the Scriptures. They teach us what it means to need and to want and to cry out for help. For they know what its all about – **the grace and mercy of Jesus.** And that nothing else matters.

So it seems we can learn a thing or two about **seeing** from this **blind man!** About seeing Jesus aright.

For the God who created everything from nothing in the beginning, is still creating from nothing – now in the person of Jesus. And so just as He reached down in the beginning and formed Adam from the dust of the ground, He reaches down this day and forms eyeballs from the dust of the ground to give to this man. And as he washes at Jesus’ command in the pool of Siloam, he is given sight. Both physical eyes and spiritual eyes. *And which is the greater miracle?* Both are creations out of nothing. The man born blind *and* born dead in his trespasses and sins, now sees his

Saviour and clings to him by faith. “*Lord, I believe*” he confesses at the end, *and he worshiped Jesus.*

And so, it seems, it is good to be blind around Jesus! For to the blind He gives sight, and forgiveness to the sin-filled, and life to the dead. Which is why at the beginning of every service here, we confess that we are blind and dead sinners. That apart from Christ we have no good in us. We cry out for mercy, and our Saviour has mercy. Giving us sight and life in the forgiveness of our sins. Raising us again, and restoring us as His children. For that is what He has come to do. That we might fix our eyes on Jesus, and say “*I believe.*”

For He is the light that has come into our darkness. The light to enlighten our dark and sinful hearts and minds, that we might *walk as children of light.* (Epistle) . . . *But what does that mean?* To walk as children of light. Doing good? Certainly. To see our neighbor – even our enemy! – in need, and to help them. To have the same mercy and compassion on them that Christ has on us. For what have we deserved from Him? Yet what have we received? And so yes, to walk as children of light is to walk in love. Striving always to do what is best for the other, no matter how hard, no matter the cost.

But even more, to walk as children of light is to walk in faith. For you cannot live the life you have not first received. And so it is to receive – *and continue to receive* – the light and life of God, given us in Christ Jesus, through the death and resurrection that atoned for all our sins. For He died for we who are dead, and lives so that we may live. That we may live as we are washed in His baptismal waters, and faith is created out of nothing. That we may live as we continue to be washed in His forgiveness every day – every day the old sinner in us drowned, and the new man raised to life. That we may live as we eat His nourishing body and blood, His forgiveness enlivening us, strengthening us, and sustaining us. That we may live and with every breath of our lives say not “for me” but “I believe.” In triumph or tragedy, I believe. In wealth or in want, I believe. In struggle or in times of stillness and peace, I believe. For my God is gracious and merciful and good. Not sometimes, but always.

In the prologue of his Gospel, John told us that the darkness tried to overcome the light, but could not. We are given a picture of that truth here. And it may seem as if the darkness is overcoming the light in your life – by forces from without, and by the struggles of sin within. But still, the darkness cannot win. For your triumphant

Saviour has taken **you** into His nail-pierced hands, and will lead you through the valley of this dark and sinful world, and into the Easter of Heaven. You may not know the “whys”, you may not know the “hows”, but it is not to such knowledge that you cling. **But to His promise.** His promise of life, which is as sure and true as His empty tomb. For in Him, that is the future of your tomb as well. When the darkness of death is shattered by the light of the glory of Heaven, once and for all.

Until then, He is working. Making blind, that He may give sight. Humbling, that He may exalt. Slaying, that He may give life. *So rejoice when that happens to you!* That we may learn to walk by faith and receive all these gifts. Seeing ourselves and our Saviour rightly. Fixing our eyes on Jesus and crying out, “*Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.*” (Mark 9:24)

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.