

4th in Lent, March 2, 2008 (Communion Sunday); 2nd Baptist Church, Lincoln;
Robert C. Molby, Interim Pastor

Hymn # 381, "Open My Eyes, That I May See" (verse 1 only)

Reading from the Old Testament: (Stand to honor the word read today) (See notes made in my version of the bulletin)

1 Samuel 16:1-13: God sends Samuel to find and anoint as king one of the sons of Jesse; ". . . the LORD does not see as mortals see."

Encounter with Jesus: The Man Born Blind – John 9:1-41

*Gospel Reading: (Read from the Message translation by Eugene Peterson; have people close their eyes and pretend blindness as the scripture is read; takes 8 ½ minutes to read.)

John 9:1-41. Jesus puts mud on the eyes of a man born blind and sends him to wash in the pool at Siloam. The blind man gains his sight and immediately becomes a missionary! John 9:1-41 (The Message)

Follow the reading of the scripture with people having their eyes closed and pretending to be blind, take two minutes to have them converse with one other about their experience.

(5 ½ to 6 minutes to read the following:)

In this N.T. reading there is a lot of blindness. There is the physical blindness of the man born that way; there is blindness as to the cause of suffering in the world; there is blindness on the part of the religious authorities that Jesus was from God and that he was doing this healing with the power of God; there was blindness on the part of the man healed even after he was healed. He didn't know who Jesus was until later when Jesus told him who he was.

There is self-chosen blindness in this N.T. story. There were some who did not want to see because if they did they would have to change their life styles. The parents: if they chose to believe that what had happened was from Jesus they would be kicked out of the Temple.

There is a deeper lesson here that concerns the Temple. Why were these Jewish leaders so agitated that Jesus had healed this man? Was it because it was on the

Sabbath? That could be part of it. But there is something else that is even more sinister.

Remember the story of the ten lepers; all were healed by Jesus and only one returned to thank him for it. (Luke 17:11-19) They were healed because they did what Jesus told them to, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." It was on the way that they were healed. The one that returned to thank Jesus was a Samaritan. He did not have to show himself to the priest because he was not allowed to go there. The other 9 were Jews and were required to go. The Temple had a lock on everyone's good health. They controlled and regulated the purity laws. A leper was not pure and if he/she were not pure they couldn't go to the temple to worship. They were cut off from the community of faith as well as their family. The priest could allow them back in if they were cured; he could even tell them that they could go back to their family. Well, the reason these Pharisees were so upset about this man receiving his sight after being blind from birth is that this meant the temple authorities did not have control over that man's well being! Jesus could do it outside the temple! Furthermore, he disobeyed the temple law of not working on the Sabbath! He healed the man anyway! The Pharisees tried all kinds of things to discredit Jesus with the healing but it didn't work!

We could rephrase our question: what is the most important thing to happen in this story? Answer: the man who was healed. That was good news to many who had been shut out of the temple by the purity laws.

There is a lesson here about suffering also. It comes from the belief that suffering is caused by sin.

As they were going along they saw this man that was blind from birth. The disciples want to know who sinned, the man or his parents that he was born blind.

Now the disciples ask, "What is the cause of this man's suffering? Is it sin in his life or his parents?" Jesus says they are asking the wrong question. He says, "This man was just born that way. God can work in his life just as he can in yours or mine." And then he heals the man of his blindness. The man becomes a testimony for the power of God in Jesus.

I have a grandson who was born with only one hand. Am I to believe that he, or his parents, did something bad and that is why he has only one hand? Am I to believe that Fayette and I, his grandparents, did something bad and that is why he has only one hand? Or that our son-in-law's parents did something bad and that is

why he has only one hand? What kind of God would that be that was so mean that even an innocent baby had to suffer for something done in a previous generation? I would not want to believe in a God like that nor would anyone else that I know of.

Instead Jesus is saying God can work through this man born blind, he can work through our grandson with only one hand just as he does through you or I. Don't use something you view as a handicap as an excuse for not doing something God wants you to do.

Our grandson certainly does not use his being born with one hand as a handicap. I've seen him swim on his school's swim team, wrestle on his school's wrestling team, play the horn in his school's band, run on his school's cross country team, and right now he is working on his Eagle Scout award. He may achieve that before the year is out. I've also participated in his dedication to God as a baby, heard his confession of faith in Christ and witnessed his baptism. I don't feel cursed by God, I feel blessed by God in a mighty way. However, this week he asked me about using my golf clubs. He is going out for golf for his school!

So, if you are using something as an excuse to not come to God or be used by God it won't work with Jesus. He can bless you and use you anyway, unless you want to remain blind to the power of God in your life; unless you continue to choose not to believe in him. It's strange but you do have that power to remain blind to God if you want to. It is entirely up to you. It's a judgment that we bring upon ourselves. Look at verse 39, Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." It makes sense now, doesn't it? You can get over spiritual blindness with the help of Jesus or you can choose to remain blind in spite of Jesus. It's up to you.

We may be blind but we don't have to be unless we choose to be.

Furthermore, no matter your handicap, even if you are blind in a spiritual way, Jesus invites you to his table. This table is of the Lord not of the church. It has been prepared for those who love him and those who want to love him more. It has been prepared for those who have much faith and for those who have little. You can come to this table even if you have been here often or if you have not been here before. It is prepared for those who have tried to follow Jesus and for those who have failed. Come – it is Jesus who invites you and it is his will that you should meet him here!