

“Gift and Response”

March 22, 2020

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: John 9: 1-3,5-19,24-25,35-41

Like Angie said, the entire 9th chapter of John is one single story but is filled with many insights that just beg to be preached on. The story begins with the disciples, upon seeing a man blind from birth, asking Jesus in verse 2, “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” The assumption that blindness and other suffering comes as a punishment for sin is not one that Jesus affirms, yet it persists. That could be a whole sermon in itself, to recognize the New Testament’s continual rebuttal of the “suffering as a result of sin” argument – a rebuttal that begins with Jesus’ suffering on the cross. Another sermon could deal with the fact that the crowd did not recognize the man once he was healed of his blindness. We could talk about how identifying people with just one or two adjectives is dehumanizing. We are each created in the image of God and by just seeing a person as blind or tall or pretty, or round or smart or gay, or by skin color, social economic class, or gender is not acceptable. Recognizing and pigeon holing people by just one or two of their characteristics is an insult to them and the One who made them. As you read the passage, you might notice that when the man is brought before the religious authorities who then debate if the miracle even happened or not, and then go on to try and define who is a sinner and what activities makes God listen and what activities keeps God from listening to them; Jesus is absent. Jesus is not even on the scene from verses 8-34. There is a sermon there about the things we do in the name of religion that Jesus wants no part of. Like I said, this chapter is loaded with preaching material, but today I want to look at the very beginning and end of the story – the parts where Jesus is present in the scene.

I first want you to notice this healing story is all Jesus. In almost every other miraculous healing in the Gospels, Jesus heals in response to amazing faith. In Matthew 9, two blind men follow Jesus and enter the house where He is staying to ask for healing. Jesus asks them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.” Then He touched their eyes and said, “according to your faith, let I be done to you.” Their eyes were opened. Mark 2 tells of men carrying a paralytic to Jesus but not being able to get to Him through the crowd, so they took off the roof of the house where Jesus was teaching and lowered the man with ropes. Verse 5, “When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven... stand up, take your mat and walk.’” He did. Or the woman with a 12 year hemorrhage, “Daughter, your faith has made you well.” To the Centurion in Matthew 8, “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith”, and the servant was healed in that hour.

You get the picture. Jesus heals in response to faith, except in this morning’s reading. Today He heals the man’s blindness in response to a conversation Jesus was having with His disciples. The man does not know who Jesus is. From what we can tell, the man was just sitting there, minding his own business, probably begging for alms; when he hears a conversation he has probably heard a hundred times before. Only this time the conversation is followed by the sound of spitting, of someone adding dirt to the spit to make mud, then the sensation of wet mud being spread on his eyes. The man had done nothing. Jesus identified the person to heal. Jesus

initiated the contact. Jesus determined the healing process. Jesus did the work. It was all Jesus. The man just had to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. Jesus really wants to forgive us. He wants to heal us. Jesus came to earth to initiate this whole healing thing. That is as true today as it was 2000 years ago, but I wonder what would have happened if the man would have simply washed with some drinking water he might have had with him. Would he have been able to see? What if he just asked another passerby for water to wash, or used his shirt or went to another water source besides the pool of Siloam? Would he have been healed? Obviously I don't know, but I don't think so. I think there needs to be a response of obedience from the individual in order for Jesus' miraculous healing to occur.

I am following this line of thinking because I see this story as parallel to the forgiveness and healing of salvation. Jesus has already done all the work. Jesus identified you and me as people He wants to heal. Jesus initiated the contact, He came to us. Jesus determined the healing process – taking our sin to the cross with Him and putting it to death there. Jesus did all the work. Yet we, like the blind man, still must respond in obedience, respond in faith, respond in Christian faith. Jesus didn't tell him to go wash in just any pool. He said to wash in the pool of Siloam which verse 7 says “means sent”. Jesus is the One sent by God. We must wash in the pool of the “sent” – the One sent from God. We must wash in Jesus. This is a baptism story.

When Jesus enters the scene again at the end of the story, He makes it clear that it is not just physical blindness that needs healing, but spiritual also. The way He says it is a little confusing, but Jesus pulls the whole story together. He says those who know they are blind will be able to see, and those who think they can see will remain blind. I don't know about you, but I have had the opportunity to tour many different caves and underground mines. One of the things almost every tour includes is the moment they have you sit in one place while they turn out the lights. Once you get so far underground, there is no light at all. It is a darkness darker than anywhere else on earth. Absolutely no light. In that kind of darkness, you have not landmarks, no cues outside yourself to orient yourself. The only orientation you have is yourself. Distance is imperceptible. Where you are in relation to walls, people and danger is impossible to determine. You can sense your heart beat, if you are hot or cold, if you are scared or intrigued. You can be still and wait for your eyes to adjust, but they never do because there is no light. There are no outside clues. The only understanding of where you are is what you feel at that moment. Is there a better picture of the blindness Jesus is talking about? All things are oriented to yourself. You cannot see others. You cannot see the bigger picture and where you are in it. Your whole world is how you feel right then. You are completely oriented by yourself and your limited senses. That is spiritual blindness, and Jesus wants to heal it.

Jesus has already done everything necessary to heal it, but you need to first recognize that you are blind, then obediently go wash in the pool of Siloam (which means “sent”). You need to wash in Jesus. Those who claim to be okay, those who have spent so much time in the cave that they think they can see, will remain blind; but those that recognize the blindness of complete self-orientation, will be healed.

Mike Van Heyningen