

Open Our Eyes

John 9:1-17

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Rev. Cynthia Cochran-Carney, First Presbyterian Church of San Rafael, CA

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹²They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

John 9:1-17

What do you see when you look around your house or apartment in these days of shelter in place? Do you see books to read, unfinished projects, dwindling supplies? We are living through this very difficult time because there is a virus we cannot see that is spreading across the world and we are concerned about its effects of people who are older and who may not have strong immune systems.

I have been thinking about what we see and what we cannot see and how that shapes our lives. There is physical seeing – reading books, our computer, watching TV, seeing the beauty in nature, seeing faces of people we love. When our vision changes it affects us. I have progressive lenses and trifocal contacts. I talk to many people whose vision has changed. Some for the worse, some for the better. It is hard when our vision changes.

We are people who like to see things before we believe it.

And we like to know why something happens. Cause and effect. It is a human tendency. It is true of us and it was true of the disciples and the Pharisees.

John 9:2 *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”*
They meet a man, blind from birth, and the disciples ask Jesus whose fault it is. They don't ask him to heal the man. They're just curious, they want to know who is responsible for this unfortunate condition.

Those disciples were playing the old **blame game**. They wanted to know whose fault it was. They needed some kind of reasonable allocation of guilt — so they could say he's blind because of this or that, this harmful action, that sinful person.

Jesus rubs mud on his eyes and heals him and tells them they are asking entirely the wrong question:
“He was not born blind because of his own sin or that of his parents, but to provide an opportunity to show the power of God.”

Jesus said it was all about manifesting **God's glory**. They were asking the wrong question. He said - don't ask why he is blind, but how will God's glory be shown through him. And then went ahead and healed the man.

Tells him to go wash in the pool. Cleanse himself. The man never asked. It is a gift and a task. Only then can he see. John talks about water 29 times in the gospel. Be cleansed so you can see. Reflects the waters of baptism - be cleansed, so you can see yourself and the world with eyes kingdom of God.

It is interesting that no one believes the man. They don't even recognize him. Maybe they never really looked at him before - a blind beggar, a nobody. They doubt who is he, they question if he was really healed. They cannot see the miracle, the sign in front of them.

He explains it - to the neighbors, to the Pharisees, the Jews. He becomes more confident, more outspoken, about his healing and the man who healed him

Finally, Jesus seeks him out after he has been expelled from the synagogue. The man believes Jesus is the Son of God and now he has abundant life, freedom.

Listen to the end of story from the Message (John 9:35-39)

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him. He asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man said, "Point him out to me, sir, so that I can believe in him." Jesus said, "You're looking right at him. Don't you recognize my voice?" "Master, I believe," the man said, and worshiped him.

Jesus then said, "I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind."

Who is blind and who can see? Jesus exposed other kinds of blindness as he healed those who were physically blind. The Pharisees, the disciples, the crowd. His disciples were often blind to the truth about Jesus – his truth, his light, his love. They were stuck in old ways of cause and effect, keeping score, clean and unclean.

What if seeing really *was* believing, what if seeing meant going deeper? What if we could learn to look at life, and even faith that way? Not as a crime scene where we are forever asking what is wrong, what's missing, what doesn't add up, and who is to blame,

....But as a scene of wonder, a transformation scene in which, by prayerful looking, we discern signs of God's presence, God's healing power, God's astonishing beauty? Even in the midst of these very difficult times we can look for beauty and hope.

Suppose that Jesus came to teach us how to see? So often in the gospels - especially in John - from Jesus' earliest invitation, "Come and see," to his opening the eyes of the blind, his naming himself as "The Light of the World."

In the other gospels in all those parables, many were simple exercises in seeing, in perceiving the reality of God concealed in everyday events and objects - something lost - a coin, a sheep, a son, a traveler needing help. In all this Jesus seems to be inviting people to a new way of seeing, a new way of discerning, of recognizing God, and God's realm at the core of everything that is.

Movies help me see things differently. One of my all-time favorite movies is Field of Dreams. It certainly makes us think about the sacred activity of baseball and the how seeing and believing are related. I am thinking about it more this year because I am thinking about delay of opening day of baseball season.

Because Ray has listened to a voice saying, "If you build it he will come," this otherwise sensible farmer has plowed up a large section of the family cornfield to

construct a baseball diamond, complete with lights. One night his daughter sees someone on the field. As he flips on the diamond's lights to see who is there, they frame the entire baseball field on which stands a lone figure. Ray enters the field and starts to play ball with the figure, whom he discovers is the long-dead Shoeless Joe Jackson.

In the movie there are boundaries of what is sacred space (the ball field) and what is ordinary and worldly. Throughout the movie, the plot moves along showing that some people can see the players on the field and some cannot. It makes us think what can we see with eyes of faith or do we only see what the world tells us is real and true? Throughout the movie, Ray sees things that others do not. Only when the other people have awakened to the hope and healing of what the field could mean for people do they see and believe.

Before Jesus, religious Jews saw the Samaritans as enemies and unclean. But Jesus told the story of good Samaritan who was a neighbor who helped the wounded man. He talked to the Samaritan woman and offered her living water. He called to see people of different ethnic groups not as enemies but as neighbors.

The blind man suddenly sees the world with all its beauty and all its pain.

How is this time of the coronavirus pandemic changing what you see... about yourself, people you love, our community, even the world?

I will close with some excerpts from a piece by David Brooks in the New York Times yesterday about what he is seeing in new ways.

I'm beginning to appreciate the wisdom that cancer patients share: We just can't know. Embrace the uncertainty of this whole life-or-death deal.

There's a weird clarity that comes with that embrace. There is a humility that comes with realizing you're not the glorious plans you made for your life. When the plans are upset, there's a quieter and better you beneath them.

We're seeing the world with plague eyes now. We're all going through the same experiences. People in Seoul, Milan and New Jersey are connected by a virus that reminds us of the fundamental fact of human interdependence.

Most of us are self-distancing at the same time. Most of us are experiencing the same pause in normal life, undergoing deeper reflections inspired by that pause,

experiencing the same anxieties and fears, reading the same memes. So many human universals.

The great paradox, of course, is that we had to be set apart in order to feel together.

On Twitter I saw a picture of a house where an older lady was self-isolating. Two neighborhood kids put on a cello concert on her front porch.

Have you noticed that music and art are already filling the emotional gaps left by the absence of direct human contact?

Through plague eyes I realize there's an important distinction between social connection and social solidarity. Social connection means feeling empathetic toward others and being kind to them. That's fine in normal times.

Social solidarity is more tenacious. It's an active commitment to the common good — the kind of thing needed in times like now.

Solidarity is not a feeling; it's an active virtue. See the value of each person.

*Opinion, New York Times, 3/19/2020
David Brooks – "Screw This Virus"*

I see acts of kindness. I see people making phone calls and checking in on friends from church and community and neighbors. I'm seeing young kids, millennials, who are volunteering to go take groceries to people who are home and cannot go out. I'm seeing an incredible influx of nurses, heroic nurses, who are coming and working many more hours than they worked before, doctors who fearlessly go into the hospital to work.

This is a really unprecedented and difficult time that will test us. When we do get through it, I hope and pray that it will cause us to reexamine what has caused the fractional division and polarization we have in this country.

May God help us see all the ways we are connected to one another. Amen.