



Sermon, July 10, 2016
Rev. Dr. Craig S. Pesti-Strobel
Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

Sermon Series: Come Meet Jesus
"Beyond Mere Blindness"

Main Point: *In order to perceive and understand the Spiritual Reality Jesus opens up for us, we need for him to open or inner awareness and take off the blinders our culture fashions for us.*

Call to Worship

John 9:1-5

Leader: As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.

People: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Leader: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Song

"Light of the World"

FWS # 2204

Scripture Reading

"A Blind Man's Healing"

John 9:6-12

6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, **7** saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. **8** The 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?" **9** Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." **10** But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" **11** He 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." **12** They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

Hymn

Scripture Reading

"Is the Healing Real?"

John 9:13-34

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. **14** Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. **15** Then 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." **16** Some 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. **17** So 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."

18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight **19** and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" **20** His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; **21** but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." **22** His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the

Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. **23** Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." **25** He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." **26** They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" **27** He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" **28** Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. **29** We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." **30** The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. **31** We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. **32** Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. **33** If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." **34** They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Reflect on this: *"Jesus indicates that human suffering is not punishment from God, but rather an opportunity for God to work blessing. Why do we continue to think God punishes people with suffering? What places of suffering in the world would you like to ask God to bless with healing and hope?"*

Prayers for our World: *As people share, please respond:*

Pastor "Lord in your mercy."

People: "Hear our prayer."

The Lord's Prayer

UMH # 895

Prayer Response

Scripture Reading

"Who Is Truly Blind?"

John 9:35-42

35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" **36** He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." **37** Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." **38** He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. **39** Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." **40** Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" **41** Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Summarizing Reflection

Come Meet Jesus: "Beyond Mere Blindness"

If you take a journey to the Grand Canyon, you are rewarded with one of the most amazing sights in the world. There are various observation platforms around the rim of the canyon, as well as a trail that one can take (complete with handrail) down into the canyon. The Grand Canyon is so immense, that as you travel around the rim, the vista before you continues to change and present ever-new wonders and beauty to behold.

This is a helpful metaphor for understanding how it is that we observe and understand the world around us. The culture we are raised in provides us with a worldview, or a way of looking at and understanding how to live in our world.

The Way of Jesus Challenges Our Worldviews

One of the things that Jesus did was to challenge the prevailing worldview of his time. This worldview prescribed who had access to God and how that access was obtained and maintained.

First Question: "Who sinned?"

The first issue concerns the man's situation in life. As we look around we realize that life is actually rather capricious and random on whom it inflicts with what. Life is certainly not fair, and often seems to be completely unjust. Why is there suffering, inequality, injustice, pain? We have a sense that something is wrong, out of kilter, broken.

Tied to this is the realization that there is a better way, perhaps an ideal or intended way of things. So, why are things broken? What wrong has been committed that results in such tragedies? This sense of the brokenness of things set in the context of wanting to find a reason why things are not the way they "should be" or "could be" provides the seedbed for the disciples' question: "Who sinned?"

The entire sacrificial system (pretty much anywhere in world) is based on the idea that the effects of our actions – and especially our sinful actions or misdeeds or even who we come in contact with – stick to us or even infect us, rendering us unclean. If nothing is done to remove this uncleanness or residue of sin, then other effects may accrue. Hence, there must have been some unintended or unexpiated sin that caused the man's blindness.

Jesus' response is in direct contrast to these assumptions: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

Jesus views the world as a place where God's goodness and love and mercy is to be revealed and experienced, not a place where God's

punishment is inflicted. This is a very important distinction. The shift in point of view acknowledges that there is brokenness in the world, even sin, but God's response is not one of condemnation but rather of healing, of setting things right.

The world exists as a realm in which God's glory is revealed.

St. Irenaeus, a leader in the early Church, once said, "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." I'm fond of quoting this, but it points to a profound truth: God glories and rejoices in human wholeness and restoration. God does not glory in or enjoy human suffering, destruction or disintegration in any form. This is what Jesus means by doing "the works of light."

It is not accidental that John relates this story in terms who is blind and who is unable to see. This story poses significant questions for us to consider while we talk about worldview, and what it means to see things a certain way. We think we see, we think we understand, we think our point of view correctly and completely encompasses the way things are. As if that single viewpoint of the Grand Canyon completely captures the whole of the canyon.

This chapter in John depicts in dramatic fashion a struggle between two religious ways of looking at the world. Jesus has come to shed light on the reality of God's way, but he has to confront an entrenched viewpoint that is still around today.

God's viewpoint is not ours. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD (Isaiah 58:8).

This is the problem with reading everything in the Bible literally. Jesus has to be our lens. We read the Bible through the lens of Jesus, or in the light of Jesus, who reveals completely the reality of God. "While I am in the world I am the light of the world."

It is an all-too-common temptation to elevate the words of Scripture, and in this case, the commandments of Scripture, into the place of God. When you do that, you presume that you can pronounce judgment on other people, and presume you know more about God than God does.

The Bible gives witness to God, and Jesus is the revelation of God. That is what John means when he says that the Word was in the beginning with God, and the Word was God, and the word became flesh and dwelt among us. Do you want to know the word of God? Look at Jesus. Learn from Jesus. Study Jesus. Come to know Jesus personally.

The Christian worldview is a way of looking at things through the eyes of Jesus. That's what it's all about. The Gospels are our manual for learning how to look at the world through Jesus' eyes.

But here is the crux of the matter: I don't want you just to take my word for it. I invite you to come to know Jesus personally yourself. Take his yoke upon you, learn from him. He is our guide and the light to our path as we journey to the heart of God.