

Thy Will Be Done...InLight!

Shepherd's Grace Church

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As he 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." ¹⁸The 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 ¹⁹and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but 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." ²²His 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. ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." ²⁴So 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." ²⁵He 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.

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 (John 9: 1-41) (Also Read Eph. 5: 8-14)

Have you ever been walking through a dark room late at night? I remember the Kansas City Royals were in a pennant race back in the early ‘80’s and George Brett, the perennial KC all star was batting around 375! Brett was so hot it seemed all he had to do was look at a baseball and it would somehow find its way to the outfield for a base hit!

One night, late in July during a Royals home stand, Brett was walking through the living room of his Kansas City home. Suddenly, he was on the floor writhing in pain and calling out for his wife to come and help him! George Brett, one of the greatest athletes on the planet at the time had tried to walk through his own living room late at night in the dark! He stubbed his toe, broke it and was out for about 4 weeks right in the middle of a Royals pennant race and another chase for a personal batting crown for him!

Later, reflecting on the accident, Brett said, “I have walked across that room a thousand times in the dark and never had a problem. Tonight my luck ran out!” Brett went on to say, “You know what...the

light switch was right there in the hall as I entered the room. All I had to do was reach out for it!" Most of us have had similar experiences to George Brett! We have wandered down to raid the ice box or find a drink or take care of some other business in the middle of the night. As we entered a room, we passed right by a switch that would have made it easy for us to find our way but we believed we could make it through the darkness. Sometimes we were fortunate. Other times...not so much! As the apostle tells us today, there is nothing good that happens in the dark!

Arise and shine Paul says. Turn on the switch as you find yourself in darkness and become the light of the life for the world, the light of Christ as Christ shines on you and guides your path! Do not walk by the switch thinking you can make it through the darkness! You cannot! You will stub your toe and find yourself failing to achieve all you are intended to achieve. "Everything exposed to the light becomes visible." That which can do harm can now easily be avoided and that which can be used to accomplish more for God's Glory can now be clearly seen! Turn the light on!

That light is exactly where we meet Jesus this morning. He is walking down the road and comes across a person blind from birth! Those who are following the daily devotions remember that we talked earlier this week about the path Jesus is on. As we walk along this path with him, there are some who are ahead of us. They are confident in their faith. There are some who are behind us, unsure and still searching every step. It is almost as if they are in the dark and they hug the walls looking for the light switch so they do not stub their toe.

We are walking with Jesus, trying to keep up with Him and to listen and learn from him as he walks along, but there is a fourth group. These are the ones who have stepped off the path. They seemed to have quit the journey and are just watching as Jesus passes by. It is tempting for us to judge them. It is tempting to point an accusing finger and ridicule them for reaching out to Jesus even as they themselves are not willing even to walk with him. It is tempting to suggest that they are freeloaders, seeking something for nothing.

It is tempting for us, but Jesus is not tempted in this way! He does not judge, instead, He accepts what is in front of Him and recognizes that He "did not come into the world to condemn, but to redeem." (John 3: 17) So, when His disciples ask, "Rabbi, who sinned this man or his parents," Jesus does not enter into the cultural conception of sin. Neither does he condemn his disciples because they do! He does not challenge their notion that someone has to be guilty when a wrong exists, but He gently goes about demonstrating another alternative.

I wonder about this approach in our society. It is common practice when we see someone who is on welfare or food stamps to suggest that they could be doing something more for themselves. It is acceptable in today's society to suggest that they are simply trying to get something for nothing. It is popular to label them and lump them together without seeing the singleness of their situation. Some people have genuine needs and our willingness to see those needs invites not condemnation but confirmation that we all need help once in awhile.

Jesus does not judge the ones who have stepped off the road today. Instead He recognizes that they are among those who need help at that point in their journey. He also does not accept that those who need help are guilty of sin. Instead He looks at each of them as Children of God, and reaches out to them just as He reaches out to each of us. He says to those who struggle, God has a plan for you! He says to us as we are tempted to judge them (Who sinned?) perhaps there is a greater plan at work here than the one you are seeing. Perhaps you need to open your eyes.

Jesus says, "No one sinned here! This man was born blind so that God's glory might be revealed in him!" As Jesus makes this observation, we are invited into the alternative that comes from the nearness of God's kingdom. In God's kingdom, there is no darkness or condemnation, there is only the light of possibility. In this light, the only sin is turning from the light to eternal darkness where things really do go bump in the night! Jesus desire is not for us to recognize fault in others. In Matthew 6 he says, "Why do you seek to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye when you do not even see the log that is in your own eye!" The apostle Paul says the same thing slightly differently. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God!" (Romans 3: 23)

Jesus is reminding the disciples gently this morning that sin is not to be judged by us and neither are circumstances. People step off the road to Calvary for many reasons. Instead of criticizing them we are to encourage them, to invite them into options they might not have considered to this point. No one sinned here! No one turned away from God and rejected God for all eternity! In fact, this man who was born blind was intended, just as all of you were intended to be used for God's purposes and for God's glory.

Jesus reminds us that all are invited to participate in God's kingdom. Those who are born with what we call defects on one area of their ability have gifts in many other areas. The challenge is to allow them to use those gifts by looking past the defect and seeing the possibility. It is not a given that all will choose God's will to be done in their lives. It is a choice that each individual must make for themselves. This is

made clear in the way the disciples are invited to consider the man this morning. Jesus says, "This man was born blind so that God's glory might be revealed in him!"

Jesus does not say that God's glory has to be revealed, or must be revealed, or will be revealed. In his response to the disciples, Jesus gives full dignity to the person who is about to be invited into full participation in God's kingdom. He says that the man was born so God's glory might be revealed, giving the man a choice in the man's own destiny! God's glory will only be revealed in this man if the man chooses to allow God's glory to be revealed. Anything more than this on Jesus' part would be the equivalent of cosmic bullying! For Jesus to assume the man's willingness or to force the man's participation would be to deny the man's full rights as a human! These are rights God gives to all of us. They are inalienable and undeniable! Jesus' next actions affirm that!

He spits on the ground and makes mud then puts the mud on the man's eyes. To this point, the man has said nothing, Jesus has asked nothing. Now, however Jesus interacts with the person. The man has mud on his eyes through no fault of his own. Jesus commands the man, "Go and wash." The man can choose at this point to do as Jesus asks or to ignore him, brush the dirt from his eyes and go about the dark and dreary world of blindness to which he has become accustomed. We might think this is an easy choice. It costs the man nothing to go and wash. He can change his life if he performs this simple task and he can have more than perhaps he ever imagined.

To make this leap, however fails to take into account the fullness of the decision in front of the man. The man has grown comfortable receiving something for nothing. His life is nice and neat and while it is not luxurious, it is not threatened daily by the stresses of life. To be in darkness is not just an absence of sight, it is in many ways an absence of stress. For most of us the choice is clear but we must remember that if we want to walk to Calvary, we must count the total cost! We were born so that God's glory might be revealed in us, not so that God could force us to bow to his will by bullying and coercion! The decision facing the man is huge!

Jesus does his part to make the choice available to the man. He meets the man where he is. Noticing this is critical! We seek Jesus and we seem to think we have to go someplace special to find Him. We need to go to the right church or to the right bible study. The reality is that we should look for Jesus wherever we are! When we wake, He is there. When we lie down, He is there and as we stand at the side of the road, too tired, too beaten, too battered to believe we can continue on our journey to Calvary, there He is! Jesus meets us where we are and there we should look for him! It should be no surprise that we find Him! Once Jesus finds the man, we know the choice the man makes. We just should not

think the man enters it lightly. He can spend the rest of his life anonymously or he can forever be known as the man whose eyes were opened.

After the man chooses the reaction of his family and friends are telling! They see him differently. He is no longer the freeloading freak who sits beside the road begging for a handout. He is now able to provide for himself and perpetuate a lifestyle that is different. The people he knows do not know him any longer. "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" they ask. We were comfortable with him as long as he posed no threat to us. Now he is changed and we are not sure if he is safe! What did he want from us all those years we gave him something for nothing because we thought he was nothing? How dare he take all our hard earned resources, the meager little extra we could have used to provide even more for our own. We kept him alive...he was nothing but we kept him alive! How dare he think he could change his station in life!

Others said, "It is not him but someone who looks like him!" People don't really change they think! The man we knew must have moved on and while this person looks like him, we do not believe anyone can really change. Once a beggar, always a beggar! Once a thief, always a thief! In fact that seems to be the prevailing attitude in our society today. People who are convicted of a crime enter a prison that is called a "Correctional Facility" with the idea that they will be changed in the facility. When they are released after having paid the penalty for their crime they are welcomed back into society and all is forgotten...NOT! Convicted criminals end up committing other crimes about 70% of the time after they have been in prison the first time. An overwhelming number of them say they committed the crime because they could not find a job or any means of support for themselves or their family. "No one wants to hire a convict!" Even if someone looks like a criminal, they are suspect. So it was with the man!

This week, Michael Vick was traded to the New York Jets from Philadelphia! Vick had been convicted of crimes that were horrible and should not, could not and were not to be tolerated by society! He deserved to be removed and to spend time in prison. How much? That is up to the courts to decide! We have a legal system that we have given authority to decide what is correct punishment and what is cruel and unusual. We must trust the system. Michael Vick trusted the system. He went into prison and paid the price for his crimes. Now he is out and playing professional football again. When he was traded there was a stirring of public outrage. Vick should never be given a second chance they said!

Now, I do not know Michael Vick. I think his crimes were horrible! I think also that by all accounts, Vick has been a model citizen since his release. He has not appeared to be the same person and yet others

have wanted to treat him as the same person. They have wanted to continue to punish him in spite of the fact that we have said he paid the price for his crime.

We see people everyday like the blind man, like Vick. We continue to wonder about their sin. We fail to take into account that their past just might be a chance for God's glory to be revealed. The blind man wanted to own his new identity. He was not afraid to remember his previous one as a part of his new one but those who were closest to him continued to deny him. "It is not him!" while he continued to say, "I am the man!" How can God's glory be revealed in the world when the world will not give people the opportunity to change and contribute. How can God's glory be revealed in the world when we are unwilling to turn on the light switch...when we continue to stumble in the darkness of our own contradiction!

The people could not answer the question. They could not get past the transformation that had taken place in the man. They were afraid! They were skeptical! They were human! They turned to where we encourage them to turn. They turned to the church! They took their issue to the church leaders...those who were charged with sharing the Word of God. The church leaders, forgetting all the times God had shown up in their midst in the past turned not to grace but to government. They turned to the law, law which had been perverted to the point where it was unrecognizable.

Jesus healed on the Sabbath they said! "On six days shall you work and on the 7th day shall you rest!" they said! This man does not honor the law so he cannot be from God they said.

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus has been demonstrating the logic behind the law. He wants the church to know, he wants us to know that the law is not intended to supersede compassion, it is intended to stand side by side with compassion. Work on the Sabbath is not a reason to ignore human suffering. Human suffering on the Sabbath is reason to work! The church gets hung up once again in how we do church and forgets why we do church. They cannot see God for the grace that abounds in the young man's story.

Some do see the possibility of Jesus' mighty signs however. They ask how the man can do such great work apart from the presence of God. They struggle with his credentials but cannot deny his results. They wonder where he came from and if there is anything in his past that might come back to embarrass them. They wonder if he might be a Michael Vick who seems to be changed...but what proof is there really! Does he have a DUI in his past? What kinds of sexual situations has he been involved with? Has he been married? Has he been divorced? Is he...you know...one of those perverts! We just do not know they tell the man formerly blind!

The formerly blind man says, "He might not have passed your ordination interviews but here is an astonishing thing...I was blind and now I see!" In saying these kinds of things the man antagonizes the church. Here at Shepherd's Grace we know what it is like to antagonize the church. We remember that people in power, even in the church do not like to listen to people who have other opinions, other strategies or other issues than their own. We remember what it feels like to have our eyes opened to the reality of bureaucracy and we know that politics has no place in the church.

The man learns what some of us learned long ago. There is little tolerance for other opinions when people want to see only what they want to see! What they do not want to see is a person in their midst who is different...changed...other than they are! They are uncomfortable with his testimony and suspicious of his God! They drive him out because they cannot tolerate opinions other than their own and because the church just "ain't big enough for the both of 'em!"

I wonder at this point if the man had ever calculated this in the cost of becoming a disciple of Jesus. Did he ever in his wildest dreams believe that people would be suspicious of him, doubt him, despise him and drive him out? Perhaps, but did he consider that his parents, even his parents might leave him to fend for himself? They knew he was born blind! They knew he used to sit at the gate and beg! They knew he could do little for himself to exist in the world!...until one day when a man showed up at the side of the road and gave him a choice. When we make the choice of discipleship we must consider all the cost!

The man, formerly blind now sees the world for what it is...a dark, deep, desolate and lonely place where people can be cruel and calculating and cold to one another. The man now sees what was not apparent to him before and wonders if what is in front of him is worth looking at. The world, on the other hand used to see the man for what they wanted him to be...a beggar sitting by the side of the road that they could throw change to and feel good about helping. The world never wanted to help him get ahead but was willing to keep him in his place.

Now the man sits with Jesus. Jesus tells the man who he is and without hesitation, the man sees the fullness of His promise and accepts him! The world, represented here by the Pharisees see Jesus speaking with one whom they have declared unworthy and remain blind to God's reason for sending Jesus into the world. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only son that whosoever believed in him might not perish but have eternal life." The man sees all and believes! The Pharisees see nothing and as a result have no hope!

When George Brett crossed the room in darkness he broke his toe! He said, "Here is an astonishing thing, the light switch was right there beside me on the wall. I just did not turn it on." The switch is there for each of us today also. We can try to navigate the room in the dark or we can turn on the light and see clearly what is in front of us. If we choose to walk in the light, perhaps we can see the promise of God's grace for all it is! The choice is yours! Amen!