

We have found the ONE - The Blind Man

John 9:1-41

March 19, 2023 - Rev'd Lynda Johnson

What an absolutely fabulous story that is.
Told with such skill by John in his Gospel.

I want us to look at this encounter with the Blind Man in a bit of a different way today.
I want us to look at it in the different scenes as the drama unfolds.
I don't know whether you noticed that there are several scenes across what is obviously several days.

Similar to Nicodemus and the woman at the well, this encounter takes up a lot of verses in the Gospel.
It's not just a cursory coverage, there's an awful lot of detail.

Now before we get into the scenes, it's important we understand the context.
So let's look at what's happened beforehand.

Looking back into chapter 8, and if you've got your Bible open, it would be great to have a look. p. 1074 in the Pew Bibles, we see that there is lots of dispute happening in chapter 8.
People are in disagreement.

We've only got to look at the paragraph headings to see what's going on ...

- dispute over what Jesus is saying,
- dispute over who he is,
- dispute over the status of his opponents;
- and chapter 8 ends with Jesus making some powerful claims about his status with God the Father, and the Jews react to that and begin to stone him.

So the context is dramatic and very heated.

But let's look at these scenes in chapter 9.

Scene 1 - Jesus has got himself out of the temple grounds and away from being stoned, and is moseying along in **Jerusalem** with his disciples, and they walk past a blind man. And they talk about him.

Interesting isn't it that the disciples talk **about** him, not **to** him.

And notice that the blind man doesn't say anything to Jesus. He's not asking to be healed. and I would suggest that he doesn't even know it's Jesus. After all, he can't see him.

Jesus talks about light and darkness with his disciples, he makes the claim that he is the light of the world, and then proves it by bringing the blind man from being in the dark, blind, to being sighted. He starts the process of giving the man light, and he does it with his spit. That's pretty interesting.

Scene 2 - we now follow the blind man. Notice that Jesus and the disciples don't go. Jesus' part in the healing process is finished.

The man now has to do what he was told to do.

So we follow him as he goes to Siloam and washes, and he can see.

He goes home and his neighbours are surprised.

Do they recognise him or not? They think they do. They want to know what's happened.

He tells them that it was Jesus, and they want to know where this guy is.

End of scene 2

Scene 3 - likely one, maybe two, days later.

Not sure by whom, (could be the neighbours) but the man is taken to the Pharisees. There's some investigating of the facts by them, but the Pharisees can't come to a conclusion. They're divided.

They call the parents. Doesn't help.

Then they talk to the man again, who taunts them about their curiosity being just so they could follow Jesus themselves.

That made them so angry, there were more exchanges of accusation and disbelief until the Pharisees got so irate, they threw the man out. End of scene 3

Scene 4 - Jesus again. Maybe another day has gone by. Jesus has heard the gossip that the man had been thrown out, and went to find him.

And there's a theological discussion that happens about Jesus' identity. Who is he **really!!!**

Jesus uses the messianic term 'son of man' to describe himself, and reveals to this healed man, the one who can now see.... the one who has now just seen Jesus for the first time; Jesus reveals to him, that he is THE ONE.

The man confesses belief, and he worships Jesus.

Extraordinary.

Physical sight followed by spiritual sight.

But even more extraordinary is that Jesus then goes on to talk about judgement, and that he has come into the world as judge, and that judgement will be over those who see, **and** those who are blind.

This is where we see some people who had been hiding in the wings in scene 4.

Out of the background are some pharisees who have been hearing this, and they react.

What!! Are we blind too?

And Jesus who has just claimed to be the judge, judges them - and they're guilty.

Four scenes over a few days. We have a very detailed encounter.

I want to spend a little bit of time thinking about blindness and what it means.

I've learnt a new word this week - Physiognomy.

Physiognomy is the idea that a person's moral character can be known from their physical appearance. And it was a common idea in the first century.

But I think we also need to be aware that it's fairly common in the 21st century too. We often judge somebody's moral character by what they look like, don't we.

Now you've got to admit that sometimes we might be right, however to assume that someone's physical ailment is due to sin is a real problem.

In the New Testament seeing and hearing are often used on two levels.

Both the physical level when we see a literal transformation through healing, but also as metaphors for spiritual knowledge or lack of spiritual knowledge.

In Matthew 23, five times Jesus labels the Pharisees as blind.

We regularly meet people in the scriptures who can't see or hear and are healed by Jesus, and there is either some talk about light and darkness, or we hear about somebody coming to a point of understanding who Jesus is. The light goes on, so to speak.

So we often have a physical picture in a spiritual framework.

It seems incredible to us today that the disciples would ask Jesus whose sin caused the man to be born blind. We know so well, that any physical illness or disability isn't necessarily caused by sin, but in the first century that was thought to be the case.

Also, in the ancient world, there were multiple theories of how vision worked.

One view, assumes that light comes into the eye from outside and the eye processes that. That's pretty much what we believe today.

But much more common in the ancient world was the view that the eye is the source of light, or that light comes from within the body and comes out the eyes.

A good eye gives out good light, and a dark eye gives out bad light or no light at all. In that worldview, someone who is blind has no inner light at all, so nothing comes out of the eyes. The inner light has gone out and that's reflected in the blindness.

John often uses seeing and believing interchangeably, and this chapter, is the best example of it.

The man is healed, both in a physical and a spiritual sense. This is seen in a number of places throughout this chapter.

Firstly, in what Jesus said to the disciples at the beginning. Have a look at v. 3.

Jesus says - 'No one sinned, this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world'.

Jesus is saying here that his intention is that this man's physical blindness would ultimately tell a spiritual truth.

The seeing and believing being interchangeable is also seen in the interrogation with the Pharisees as the man mocks and evades, but ultimately claims, in v.25

"One thing I know: I once was blind, but now I see.

And that leads into the fullest expression when the man and Jesus meet again.

Jesus confirms for the man who it was that healed him, and the man asks for more information, and at the end of the chapter he says to Jesus, "Lord, I believe", and he worships.

The technique that John is using here helps us to see that the wonder of someone receiving physical sight, is just as potent and beautiful as someone receiving spiritual sight.

And praise the Lord - that this man received both.

But what about the Pharisees?

Jesus says to the man, and those Pharisees in the wings of this scene hear it, 'For judgement I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.

What we have here is an exposition of the reality.

There is the sight of the blind, and the blindness of the sighted.

The healed man had never seen Jesus, because after Jesus put the mud on his eyes, he went off to the Pool of Siloam and did what he was told to do.

But now that he had seen Jesus, and is asked 'do you believe in the Son of Man? which is a messianic term, Jesus is inviting him to put his trust in the one who is the revelation of God to humanity.

Jesus reveals who he is, and the man believes.

Compare that to the pharisees. All they do is argue amongst themselves about who this man is. They can't admit what is before their very eyes.

They are seeing, but denying what they see. Their sight, is causing them to actually be blind.

And Jesus cleverly points that out to them.

Jesus did not come to a world of sinners who were keen to be rid of their sin.
No, Jesus came to a world of sinners, so proud and arrogant that they are blind to their blindness.

And the brilliant shining of the true light, only blinds them more.
Jesus says to them, their guilt remains.

One of the greatest and most beautiful things about the gospel is that pride can have no place.

When we encounter Jesus, and his light shines on us, what is the response you and I give?

Are we like the blind man, who says, I believe, and worship humbly before that greatness, or are we like the pharisees, whose arrogance precludes them from seeing the best thing they could ever see.

My friends, may your eyes be truly opened by the ONE, so that your blindness is healed, both physically and spiritually. Amen.