



**TOUCH POINT**

## **Our Blinding Vision – Touchpoint for March 15, 2023**

**John 9:1-41 (MSG)** Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?” Jesus said, “You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines.

When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world’s Light.”

He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man’s eyes, and said, “Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam” (Siloam means “Sent”). The man went and washed—and saw.

Soon the town was buzzing. His relatives and those who year after year had seen him as a blind man begging were saying, “Why, isn’t this the man we knew, who sat here and begged?” Others said, “It’s him all right!” But others objected, “It’s not the same man at all. It just looks like him.” He said, “It’s me, the very one.” They said, “How did your eyes get opened?” “A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ I did what he said. When I washed, I saw.” “So where is he?” “I don’t know.”

They marched the man to the Pharisees. This day when Jesus made the paste and healed his blindness was the Sabbath. The Pharisees grilled him again on how he had come to see. He said, “He put a clay paste on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “Obviously, this man can’t be from God. He doesn’t keep the Sabbath.” Others countered, “How can a bad man do miraculous, God-revealing things like this?” There was a split in their ranks.

They came back at the blind man, “You’re the expert. He opened your eyes. What do you say about him?” He said, “He is a prophet.” The Jews didn’t believe it, didn’t believe the man was blind to begin with. So they called the parents of the man now bright-eyed with sight. They asked them, “Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? So how is it that he now sees?” His parents said, “We know he is our son, and we know he was born blind. But we don’t know how he came to see—haven’t a clue about who opened his eyes. Why don’t you ask him? He’s a grown man and can speak for himself.” (His parents were talking like this because they were intimidated by the Jewish leaders, who had already decided that anyone who took a stand that this was the Messiah would be kicked out of the meeting place. That’s why his parents said, “Ask him. He’s a grown man.”)

They called the man back a second time—the man who had been blind—and told him, “Give credit to God. We know this man is an impostor.” He replied, “I know nothing about that one way or the other. But I know one thing for sure: I was blind . . . I now see.”

They said, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” “I’ve told you over and over and you haven’t listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you so eager to become his disciples?” With that they jumped all over him. “You might be a disciple of that man, but we’re disciples of Moses. We know for sure that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man even comes from.”

The man replied, “This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes! It’s well known that God isn’t at the beck and call of sinners, but listens carefully to anyone who lives in

reverence and does his will. That someone opened the eyes of a man born blind has never been heard of—ever. If this man didn't come from God, he wouldn't be able to do anything." They said, "You're nothing but dirt! How dare you take that tone with us!" Then they threw him out in the street.

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." Some Pharisees overheard him and said, "Does that mean you're calling us blind?" Jesus said, "If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you're accountable for every fault and failure."

### **Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.**

*Jesus said, "If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you're accountable for every fault and failure."*

It is a story in contrasts. A story of reversals. There are so many twists and turns I don't know if I am driving down Lombard Street in San Francisco, or hiking up the last mile on a trail at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon.

The one who was blind at the beginning of the story now sees at the end. Those who could see at the beginning, are now blind at the end.

In the beginning, it's about who to blame. In the end, it's about who should get the glory.

And then this really weird statement at the end by Jesus: "If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you're accountable for every fault and failure."

That's a strange thing to say after you've just given a blind man his sight.

But let's go back to the beginning.

The passage starts out by trying to affix blame for the illness, the disease, the blindness. Now I realize this is strange to our 21<sup>st</sup> Century ears. We don't blame people for their illness, their disease ... we just focus on curing, right?

I mean – and let me give you a far-out hypothetical – let's just say there was a deadly virus running rampant across the world. We wouldn't be focused on where it came from, naming it after the city or country it started in, seeking to blame someone... How barbaric would that be? NO, we would be focused on stopping its spreading, testing for it, curing it... Right?!? Isn't it nice to know how far we've evolved?

But here are these barbaric disciples, using the blind man to make a theological point, or who knows, maybe a political point. Seeing him only through the eyes of their theology, their beliefs, their fears... which blinds them to the ways of God.

But Jesus doesn't care and goes on to heal the man. Seeing him not in his brokenness, but seeing him in the light of what can give glory to God.

Now, that's seeing things in a different light. Not, "What's wrong with everything and everyone, here?" But "How can God be given glory in this situation?"

In what light do we look at situations?

It's amazing what a little mud and spit can do when you see things in a different light. Apparently, a Jesus spit-take is more healing than funny.

And the blind man's friends and neighbors still can't get over him. They keep seeing him in light of how he has always been. They're not even sure he's... him. They're blinded by their vision.

And the religious leaders are even more blinded by the whole thing. They can't see the blind man in a new light, much less Jesus. They're blinded by their vision.

Jesus seems to have not only thrown mud into the eyes of the blind man, but into the eyes of his neighbors and the religious leaders. Everyone is seeing things in light of their own theology, their own belief systems, their own fears. And they are sure they are seeing things correctly. And they are all dead wrong and blinded by their vision.

*"If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you're accountable for every fault and failure."*

Jesus' words take us back to Genesis and the Garden of Eden, where the serpent tempts Adam and Eve by saying, "Your eyes will be opened to see everything, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

It is what we live for, isn't it? To be God-like, and to be able to pronounce good and evil on things. To be able to place blame, like the disciples. To be able to pronounce brokenness, like the blind man's neighbors, and to be able to rule in God's stead, like the religious leaders.

It is what we live for, isn't it? For the world to see things the way we see things. For the world to see things in light of the way we see things...

For the light in which we see things must be the way it is.

But then there is this statement from Jesus in our passage: "I am the light of the world," or "I am the world's Light."

And now, to quote the great theologian Scooby-Doo, "Ruh, roh!"

There is a different light in which we are to see things. Not the light of my experience. Not the light of my beliefs. Not the light of my fears... But the light of Christ. And that scares me.

Because I've been taught to see things through the light of capitalism and nationalism, or social Darwinism, or Atlas Shrugged-ism. I've been taught to see things through the light of "Life, liberty and the pursuit of MY happiness."

And so new light scares me. A changing world scares me. A God who throws mud into my eyes and my ways of seeing things absolutely frightens me.

My son, Tylor, once wrote in a high school paper a line that struck me in a powerful way. Here is what he wrote: **“It is not what we don't know that we fear. Rather, what we fear is who we will become, when we discover that what we believe to be true, isn't.”**

In other words, we don't fear the unknown. Rather, we fear new knowledge, new experiences, new light that contradicts our set beliefs. Because then we won't know who we are.

**We fear seeing things in a new light.**

For me, this text challenges what is the light of my life. Is it certain beliefs, rules, structures and procedures? Or is it something more, something different?

I don't think the point of this text is to read it and simply say, “New rule. Jesus is the light of the world.” The point is not to make a new rule, but to move us beyond them. To get us to see as Jesus sees.

What this means then, is that as Christians we don't start sentences with, “I believe” or “I think” or “I fear.” Rather, we start them with, “In light of Christ...”

Let me ask you, what difference would it make if you started each problem-solving situation you encounter with these words:

**“In light of Christ...”?**

And what is that light? What do those eyes see?

Well, they look at those the world sees as sinful from birth, or sinful in life, and instead see that which can give glory to God. They look on those upon whom the world seeks to place blame, and pronounce them as God's hope and glory. They see us all as one, rather than as separate.

Our structures, rules and belief systems lock people in, lock people down. And anyone who deviates from those structures, rules and belief systems is just that – a deviant.

But it isn't just others that get locked in and locked down. Our structures, rules and belief systems lock us in, lock us down, and cause us to turn a blind eye to God at work in the world. Our vision blinds us.

Rather than remembering that we are **given** sight, we think we **have** sight. And it is our sight that is determinative.

**We want to be all seeing, rather than living in the light of the one who sees all.**

Maybe we need to have some mud thrown into our eyes, so we can no longer see things in the light of our own beliefs and fears, and begin to see things “In light of Christ...”

Maybe then we can say, along with the blind man: **“One thing I do know, that though I was blinded by my own vision, now I see in the light of Christ.”**

In the night in which Jesus was betrayed, Judas, Peter and the rest were blind to the way God would work in this world. Blinded by their own way of seeing. They were locked into the view that God could only be all powerful in this world. And so, the idea that God could be all vulnerable – that God could suffer and die to show love for us – was incomprehensible. That wasn't the vision they had of God.

Why, if God could be all vulnerable rather than all powerful, what might become of me? Who will I become, if all my beliefs about how God should act are turned on their head?

In the night in which Jesus was betrayed, Judas, Peter and the rest were blind to the way God would work in this world. Blinded by their own way of seeing.

But here is Jesus, reacting to their blindness not by giving them a new set of rules, but by putting himself in them. Giving them his body, his blood, his eyes for the world. Replacing their blindness with his vision. Shining his light in their darkness.

Here is Jesus, raising a cup of wine and saying, *"Here's to mud in your eyes ... I am your light."*

**Amen.**

## **Spirit in the Desert**

### **Opening Songs**

#### **Be Still**

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

#### **Create in Me**

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

### **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

### **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

#### **See Him**

(Keith Duke)

**See him:** 1) silent and lifeless, 2) alone and forlorn, 3) broken and helpless...crowned with a garland of thorns, 4) as son and as brother, 5) related to all, 6) through the grief of a mother...hurting the most of all, 7) as healer and teacher, 8) as helper and friend, 9) as prophet and preacher...

Ignore Him? I doubt if you can.

### **The Meal**

#### **The Lord's Prayer**

(“Our Father,” Taizé Reflections)

### **Benediction**

#### **Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace**

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.

Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.

Deep peace of Christ to you.