

## Table Meditations

Based on John 9:1-41

Sunday, March 6, 2005

The Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year A

One Great Hour of Sharing

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

<sup>1</sup>As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

<sup>6</sup>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, <sup>7</sup>saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. <sup>8</sup>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?” <sup>9</sup>Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” <sup>10</sup>But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” <sup>11</sup>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.” <sup>12</sup>They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

<sup>13</sup>They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup>Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup>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.” <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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.”

<sup>18</sup>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 <sup>19</sup>and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” <sup>20</sup>His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; <sup>21</sup>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.” <sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

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

<sup>35</sup>Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” <sup>36</sup>He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” <sup>37</sup>Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” <sup>38</sup>He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. <sup>39</sup>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.” <sup>40</sup>Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” <sup>41</sup>Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

1. “Blind for a Reason”

I'm sure you've heard it before. Most of us have even thought it. We look at a particular unfortunate circumstance of life and say, “What did I ever do to deserve this?” It's the whole cause – effect treadmill, the conventional wisdom that sin caused an act of divine retribution.

The disciples saw a blind man and asked Jesus who sinned to cause his blindness, him or his parents.

Jesus' response was a cosmic shift in thinking about God *and our relationship with God*. “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.” (v.3) It is as if the Lord has closed down the business of doling out punishment for every human sin and set up shop to spread God's love and grace.

Being judged guilty under the old Law is yesterday's news when you live life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. With faith in Jesus, a whole new world of grace and forgiveness, of mercy and miracles, is revealed to you, “that God's works might be revealed.”

Our God is a loving and merciful God, who loves you so passionately that he was willing to send His Son into this world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

At this altar, you have tasted and seen His love. Go forth, and live according to this love and grace.

2. “Go, Wash”

Let's face it, the thought of anyone spitting on the ground and playing in it to make mud makes us think of something a young child would do. Yuck!

But Jesus; consider Jesus painting the withered and atrophied eye sockets of this blind man. The warm mud probably felt good to this poor beggar. Yet, he still couldn't see. “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” Jesus commanded.

The pool of Siloam was the primary water source for the city of Jerusalem. It was at the opening to Hezekiah's tunnel, cut 800 years earlier, leading to Gihon Spring, nearly 600 yards away on the outside of the city walls. Siloam means “sent” in Hebrew; truly the water sent salvation during times of siege, and water is always life giving. The pool was a popular gathering place, where everyone would come to draw their water. It was at the pool of Siloam where the blind man obtained his sight.

For a person born blind, to suddenly be given an additional sense must have been overwhelming. He could now see the textures and contours he had, up to this time, only felt. His appearance must have radically changed, because all the people at the pool who witnessed this miracle gave cause to inquire further, “Are you the man?”

Jesus sent him to the pool for a purpose. It wasn't to show off his talent. It wasn't to stir

up the religious authorities, though it did.

Jesus sent him to was at Siloam simply to communicate to the people of how great, how undeserving, and how overwhelming God's love can be. God is merciful. God does hear the cry of those in need. God is moved to act, compassionately, decisively – even miraculously.

God's love isn't to be selfishly kept to ourselves. When we hear Jesus' command to go and wash, we know that we are to go and share the same love and grace with the world as has been shown to us. When you leave this altar rail, go and wash, go and witness, go and share God's love and mercy.

3. “Do You Believe?”

“Do you believe ...” Jesus asked the man who had been born blind and now had his sight restored to him. The religious authorities had just given him a grilling. Not only him, but they hauled his parents in before them too.

This man was a practical man; my kind of guy. He hadn't boasted. He didn't make any subjective claims. He didn't wilt under the strain of hostile cross examination. He simply stated the facts, as he knew them. “One thing I do know,” he said, “that though I was blind, now I see.” (v.25) The authority of his own experience now trumps the authority of the religious experts. (with thanks to William H. Willimon, *Pulpit Resources*)

We should admire his desire to know. A great thing had turned his life upside down. And now he wanted to know. “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”

“It is the one you now see.”

The question “Do you believe?” is one that we are all forced to make. Many take the lazy, default way out. “I believe in a higher power.” or “I believe in the beauty of nature.” or “I'm Catholic, so leave me alone!” But, do you believe?

There is no need to be defensive. Simply take a look at what is right before your very eyes. The bread and the wine, the body and blood of Christ, broken and shared for you. You've tasted. You've consumed. Christ is with you. Christ is in you. Christ is before you.

And he asks, “Do you believe?”

4. “Spiritual Blindness”

The miracle of sight cuts two ways in this story. The blind man is given sight, but what is almost always lost in the details of this narrative is what Jesus tells to the indignant

religious authorities. 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.” (v.39) Oooo-E, Jesus! This is not in the book of “How to Win Friends and Influence People!”

There is sufficient warning here, if only we take the time to look. The warning is against smug, righteous, indignation - the perception that “I’m better than you are.” Those most tempted to fall into this trap are those of us at this altar rail this morning, and the one doing the celebrating and serving.

Jesus is serving us up a piece of humble pie.

Sight doesn't come through book knowledge or academic degrees. It doesn't come with the new job or promotion. It doesn't come with a beautiful house or family. It doesn't even come with community service, being a law abiding citizen, or helping out by doing good deeds and acts of charity.

Sight only comes from faith in Jesus Christ.

“Yes Lord, I believe. Help me in my unbelief,” we cry. All of us – every last one of us – have doubts, wonder about the depth of our true faith, even me. Even I wonder. Yet, I subscribe to the words of John Wesley “to preach faith until you have it, and once you have it, you will preach faith.”

It is a decision that is filled with risk. Have faith, but don't boast about it. Have faith, but don't intellectualize it. Have faith in Christ, but don't lord it over others. Have faith, but don't solidify it into doctrine like a stone.

Have faith in Jesus Christ to see the world for what it really is – God's mission field, the Lord's harvest, the beach head for God's emerging Kingdom. Have faith in Jesus Christ, and open your eyes. Take a good look at our Lord; the One who is always standing before us.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.