

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“The Whole Story”

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John 9:1-41

Have you ever noticed how John, in his Gospel, tells us about many small personal encounters with Jesus? He does not do a high-altitude flyover, summarizing Jesus’ ministry by geographical region. He doesn’t give an overview of various kinds of healing. His book doesn’t read like a systematic textbook on theology. No, John shows us how Jesus interacts with people, with individuals. Two weekends ago, we heard about Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus. Last weekend, it was the woman at the well. Next weekend, it’ll be Martha, Mary, and their deceased brother Lazarus. John often tells us about small, personal encounters with Jesus, because if we know how Jesus interacted with individuals then, we know how He interacts with us today. In these small, intimate moments, we see how Jesus related to the world 2,000 years ago, and how he relates with the world today.

In today’s Gospel, the account begins simply. “As He went along, He saw a man blind from birth.” Jesus sees a man. Think about that for a moment. Jesus sees a man.

Sometimes it’s so hard for us to really see a person. We see the Rolex watch but fail to see the broken marriage. We see the tattoos running up the arms and neck but miss the lifetime of childhood abuse. We see the high energy cheerfulness but could never imagine the deep sadness and anxiety just underneath the surface.

We have blind spots. It’s hard for us to see a person. When the disciples see this man, what do they see? They see a problem, not a person. They see a blind man, not a man who happened to be blind, and they ask Jesus: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” They ask the wrong question. They look at him as some sort of theological puzzle. Rather than seeing his need for love and compassion, they see him as some sort of object lesson. They reduce him to a teaching moment.

The disciples think they are practicing theology, but their theology takes them away from the world. They stand at a distance from the man, observing him but not seeing him. They talk *about* him but not *with* him. They do not put a gentle hand on his shoulders or put shoes on his feet or a piece of bread in his lap. They do not kindly lead him to Jesus. They stand apart from the world and want to talk theology with their teacher. They’re sort of like that guy in the red turban on the front cover. “Hmm. Whatever happened here? Who sinned?”

But Jesus . . . Jesus does something different. Jesus sees the man. Jesus sees this man as part of a greater story. The disciples had written a story which was too small. It was a story of sin and punishment from God. This man was blind. Therefore, they concluded someone clearly sinned, and God has punished this man with blindness.

Have you ever encountered people who tell the Christian story this way? It is just a story about sin and an angry God. If something bad happened to you, it’s because you had it coming. It’s a sign of God’s displeasure with you, a wake-up call, if you will.

In his book, “What’s So Amazing About Grace?” Philip Yancey talks about growing up in the south where there was a lot of ungrace disguised as Christian piety. The prohibitions were many. “At the top were smoking and drinking. Movies ranked just below these vices, with many church members refusing even to attend *The Sound of Music*. Rock music, then in its infancy, was likewise regarded as an abomination, quite possibly demonic in origin. Other proscriptions –wearing makeup and jewelry, reading the Sunday paper, skirt length for girls, hair length for boys – were heeded or not heeded depending on a person’s level of spirituality” (p. 30).

The church, as the body of Christ, should be a bastion of light and grace, but has managed somehow to gain a reputation for ungrace. Mark Twain used to talk about people who were “good in the worst sense of the word.” Or the prayer of that English girl: “O God, make the bad people good, and the good people nice.” This church is not a club for righteous people. It is a community of sinners coming before the Lord for Word and forgiveness. Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk. 2:17).

“Who sinned? This man or his parents?” The disciples did not see this man. Jesus, however, sees this man as part of a much greater story, a story of creation and restoration. Jesus knows the whole story. It does not begin with sin and punishment, but with creation. Our creative God, joyfully speaks all creation into existence, an explosion of creature. Any God who creates over 160,000 species of moths loves to create! And what do we say about stars? Or individual snowflakes?

The big story begins with creation, in all its beauty and wisdom and harmony. The big story continues with Satan’s lies and deception, and Adam’s sin, and the consequences of sin and rebellion. Painful childbearing: the entire pregnancy

will be difficult. Simple things like bread will come only by the sweat of the brow. Sickness. Death. Disappearing species. Not just mankind; the whole creation falls with mankind. Where there are livestock, there will also be deadstock. **All** creation coughs and groans. People too. Some are miscarried. Others are born still. Lord have mercy! Some are born blind. All are born with sin and into a sinful world.

The big story continues with an unrestrained curse, not on us, but on the devil. “Cursed are you. You shall crawl on your belly. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.” This refers to all the descendants of Eve, but most significantly to Jesus, the Second Adam, the Son of Man. He will crush the serpent’s head, and the serpent will bruise his heel. For us, this curse of Satan means God still cares for us. He still loves His whole creation. He will restore His whole creation. God so loved the world that He gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

When Jesus sees this man born blind, He sees this man as part of a much greater story, a story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and restoration. Jesus knows the whole story. This man and his blindness does not begin with sin, but with creation. And it does not end with punishment but with restoration. He came not to condemn the world, but to save the world.

Who sinned. This man or his parents? Jesus says to the disciples, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in his life.” Then Jesus stops talking theology and starts living it. He kneels on the ground and begins to create again. He spits and makes mud from the dust of the earth. Forming it. Fashioning it. Putting it on the man’s eyes. Then He speaks to him and tells him to go wash in the pool of Siloam, and the man comes out with perfect eyesight. Of course, it was perfect! Would the Lord do anything less than perfect when restoring His creation? No cataracts, no red/green deficiencies, no macular degeneration, no floaters, just crystal-clear eyesight, eyes working as God designed. For the very first time in his life, this man sees that happy explosion of God’s creative and colorful handiwork all around him.

It reminds me of when Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I Am.” Playing with the dust again, Jesus shows just how far back He goes. He was there playing with the dust at the first creation, forming and fashioning and molding. “All things were made through him” says John. “Without him was not anything made that has been made” (1:3). The One who was there at the start of creation has come into His creation again and is going to restore His broken world back. He will take this man and give him sight. That is His work. That is His calling, His vocation. Fix the man. Fix the world.

Of course, this happened on the Sabbath. And of course, those steeped in ungrace are peeved that Jesus has violated the rabbinic rules concerning the Sabbath. If the rabbis forbade the kneading of dough on the Sabbath, then of course, they would also forbid the mixing of dust and saliva to heal a man. Maybe that guy in the red hat on the front cover is a Pharisee, waiting to pounce on and condemn Jesus for healing on the Sabbath.

One thing leads to another, and soon the man is kicked out of the synagogue, a big deal, actually, because it means he is no longer to be considered a member of God’s chosen people. When Jesus hears of it, we see the response of compassion. Jesus goes out and finds the man and asks, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” which was a common title for the awaited Messiah. “Who is he sir?” the man asks. Jesus answers, “He is the one speaking with you.” The blind man responds, “Lord, I believe”. In verse 11, the blind man used the word “man” to describe Jesus. In verse 17, he uses the word “prophet”. Clearly, there’s progress, but he’s not there yet. A lot of people call him teacher, or prophet, but that’s not yet faith. In verse 33, he says Jesus is “from God.” Finally, in verse 38, he holds nothing back and makes the leap. “Lord, I believe” and he worships Jesus. Jesus has healed the man’s soul as well as his eyes.

This man lived his entire life in darkness, that is, until he met Jesus. He was born blind. But in our text, he was blind for only the first seven verses. After Jesus rubbed mud on his eyes and told him to wash, he could see. And for the rest of chapter 9, and the rest of his life, he was the man who *used* to be blind.

That is who we are too. We were born blind, spiritually blind. We did not know Jesus, nor have we ever seen Him, not in person. But by His creative Word, God has opened our eyes by faith to see the Light of the world (v. 5). In the Epistle, Paul writes, “One time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8). In Jesus, we have seen God’s love and mercy. In His death and resurrection, we have seen His victory over darkness, over the devil and over our sin. Jesus didn’t come to police the world. He didn’t come to condemn the world. He came to save the world that He still loves, and to restore it to its former glory. He came to save you, whom He loves, and to restore you. On the Last Day, He will play with the dust again, and will create you anew and will glorify you.

Until then, it would always be easier to exude ungrace. It’s would always be easier take a beautiful, colorful world and reduce it to black and white until the only thing people hear from the Church is sin and punishment. But in healing this man, Jesus shows us grace, not just for this one man, but grace He has for us all. He shows love not just for this man, but the love He has for His whole creation. What He has done for this man, He will do for us all. You and I will also see Jesus face to face. Amen.