

**In the Presence**

March 19, 2023

**John 9:1-16, 24-28, and 35-41**

<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>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>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."

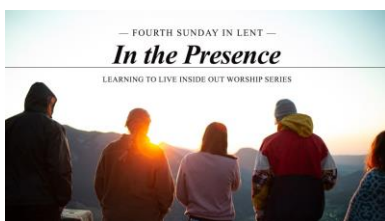
### 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16:1-13

<sup>1</sup> The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." <sup>2</sup> Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' <sup>3</sup> Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you."

<sup>4</sup> Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, “Do you come peaceably?” <sup>5</sup> He said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

<sup>6</sup> When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is now before the LORD.” <sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” <sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” <sup>9</sup> Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” <sup>10</sup> Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.”

<sup>11</sup> Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” <sup>12</sup> He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” <sup>13</sup> Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

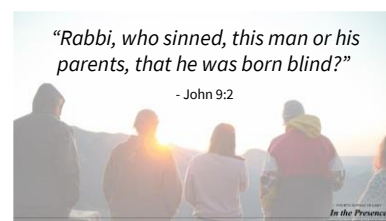


This week’s texts are about being chosen by God. This is not just about the blind man and David. God continues to choose and to use people for kingdom work.

We like to think that God calls certain people – other people. My friends, God calls us all. Some of our callings are vocational – to formal ministry. For others, the call comes through their vocation or through a place that one volunteers. Many have jobs to make money and to support themselves or their families. David was called first as a warrior and then as the king. Yet through it all he was a witness to the power of God in his life.

God calls us to all sorts of tasks and opportunities. The man that was healed of his blindness was then called to be a living witness. While this is not a specific job or task, perse, it is a call that God places upon all of our lives. Yes, God calls us all to be living witnesses to our faith. At the most basic level, a witness uses the substance of his or her own life as a means to point to what God is doing in the world. With this framing idea, let us pray as we prepare to look at how we are all called by God. Let us pray...

Please turn with me to John 9 as we work through the story of the blind man who was healed by Jesus. On the surface this miracle seems like most of Jesus' other healings. It reveals Jesus' power and it brings wholeness and new life to someone who had suffered. Yet it is also more. The story that we find in John 9 is an invitation to see the world through God's eyes. It is an invitation to stand in the presence of God and to see a world that vibrates with the presence of the holy. The healing begins with a question from the disciples: *"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"* This question reveals the traditional Jewish understanding of blindness and other infirmities and diseases.



Unconfessed or unrepentant sin was believed to lead to punishment from God. Sometimes it fell upon the person, sometimes on the generation or generations to follow. In response to their question, Jesus says neither sinned. He wants to move the conversation away from fault or guilt and into the possibility of seeing God's work in the world. Jesus identifies this man, this situation, this moment as an opportunity to show the power and presence of God at work in the world.

Through his words and actions Jesus then stakes his claim as the one who conquers the power of sin. After stating that he is the "*light of the world*," he knelt, spit, and made mud that he applied to the man's eyes. Then Jesus instructs the man to go to wash in the pool of Siloam. This pool was the source of the water used in the temple for ceremonies. Siloam means "sent." So Jesus, the one who was sent by God, sends this man to wash in the pool that means 'sent,' the pool used by the religious leaders for things such as ceremonial cleansing.

It is all rather simple: dirt, spit, mud, go wash in the pool. But that is part of the beauty of what happens and what continues to happen. Yes, God does use the Moses' and the Martin Luther King, Jr.'s of the world to do the spectacular at times. But more often God uses the ordinary, the simple, the plain, the everyday to bring God's power and glory to bear on the world. That, my brothers and sisters in Christ, is why the one who conquers sin calls us all to be his hands and feet in the world.



The man goes, washes, and is able to see. Neighbors and acquaintances alike ask if this is the same man who used to beg because he was born blind. Yes, he says, yes, I am the man! When asked about his healing, he credits “*the man called Jesus*” and explains how he was healed. In verse 13 we read that they brought the man to the Pharisees. They were the arbiters of legal interpretations, so the man is brought to them to explain this miracle. The Pharisees quiz the man too. He tells them the same story. But instead of celebrating the miracle, many focus on something else.

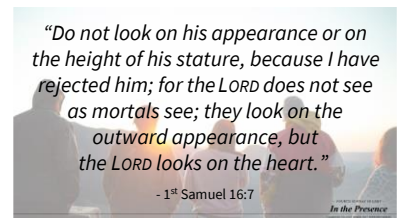
In verse 16 some of the Pharisees say, “*This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.*” Most want to poo-bah the whole thing. Most, but not all. There is a group of Pharisees – probably a small group – there that see the miracle. They speak up, saying, “*How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?*” They recognize that this man has been in the presence of God. But they are the minority. For the rest of the passage, they interrogate the man, his parents, and then the man again. The second time he is questioned the man dares to ask, “*Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?*” After reviling him, the Pharisees drive the man out of the temple. They could not fathom that this man, a sinner as they called him, could ever have something to teach them.

Yet this is just one more example of God using the ordinary, the everyday to bring glory and to reveal God’s power in the world. The Bible is full of example after example of God choosing the unlikely, the unexpected, the least to do great things for the kingdom of God.

Turn with me to 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16 for a great example of this tendency of God at work. Here in the anointing of David we are reminded of how God sees the world so much differently than we too often do.

For context, King Saul has not obeyed God's command and Samuel has just informed Saul that God is now rejecting him as the king. It is in this context that we read, *"How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."* Samuel is less than enthusiastic. Saul did not receive the news well. The whole nation is set on edge, in fact. That is why Samuel protests the mission and why the elders tremble when they see Samuel drawing near.

God tells Samuel that God has a plan. And, as usual, God does. Eliab, the oldest, the tallest, the strongest, passes before Samuel first. Taking in this specimen of a man, Samuel thinks surely this is the one. But the Lord says to Samuel, *"Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."* All seven sons pass before Samuel. Each time God says, "Nope." Maybe a little confused, Samuel asks Jesse if this is all of his sons.



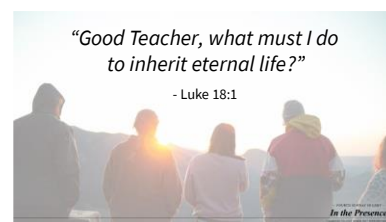
Well, actually there is one more. He is the youngest. He is out tending to the sheep. The bigger, the stronger, the older brothers? Not these, God says. Samuel says they'll wait. Finally David arrives. God says to Samuel, *"Rise and anoint him; for this is the one."* Samuel pours oil over David's head, anointing him as the future king of Israel.

As the passage closes, we are told that *“the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.”* This one is God’s chosen one. Of course the Spirit comes upon him. David is the one with a heart for God. And remember, *“the Lord does not see as mortals see... the Lord looks on the heart.”* Turn with me to Luke 18 as we see this play out in another, more “season-of-Lent” kind of way.

In verse 18 we find the rich ruler asking Jesus this question:

*“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* This is a genuine question, asked from the heart. And I believe it is

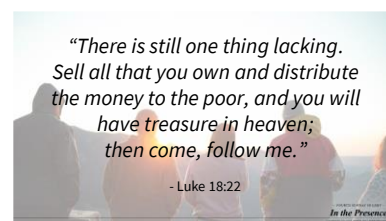
a question that we all have asked. Jesus gives the standard answer, rattling off most of the Ten Commandments. The man replies that he has kept all of these since his youth. I’d hazard a guess that most of us sitting here would respond the same way, right?



And then Jesus hits him with what I’d call a reality check:

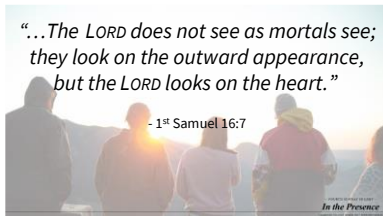
*“There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”* Looking deeper into the man’s heart, seeing in a way

that we can have trouble seeing, Jesus identifies the man’s primary barrier to fully living a life of faith. The man is saddened deeply, for he was very rich. Surrendering his wealth to Jesus was that last step. Because he could not give up his wealth, this was his barrier, his *“one thing lacking.”* Now, maybe money is not your barrier, but maybe it is. Maybe it is something else that keeps you or me from fully committing our lives to following Christ. During this season of Lent, we are called to look within as we ponder, what is the one thing that we cannot surrender or give up for Jesus?





We ask this as we consider what we must do to prepare ourselves to stand at the foot of the cross during Holy Week and before the empty tomb on Easter morning – to stand in the presence of the living God.



*“The LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”* Over and over, God gives this message. Over and over we are

invited not to see as we too often do – judging by the surface level, taking a quick read and making a snap judgment or decision. We saw this with the Pharisees in our passage from John 9, as they chose to dismiss the man and the miracle along with him because he was a “sinner.” How sad life would be if we all chose to ignore the miracles and the other ways that God is at work in the world. How sad life would be if we dismissed certain people regularly because of how society viewed them. How sad life would be if we never chose to step into these places where we fully experience the presence of God.

Living on the surface level, we miss what really matters.

Here we connect back into last week’s message, where we were all called to witness to our faith in ways that draw

others to the living water, where we were challenged to let love and grace lead as we make connections with those we meet. That’s getting beneath the surface and beginning to see as God sees, beginning to love as Jesus first loved us, beginning to invite others into the relationship that will change their lives. Here we are in the presence. In and through each of us who call Jesus Lord and Savior, may the world be drawn into the presence of the living God. May it be so for us all. Amen and amen.



**GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. What or to whom might God be inviting you to this week?
- 2) *Pray*. Where are you struggling with the eye of judgment? Pray that you can better see with God's eyes of grace.
- 3) *Study*. Read John 10:11-18. How does knowing the voice of the Good Shepherd help us to see as God sees?