

## John 9: 1-41

### Spit, Mud, and Blindness

In today's long passage from the Gospel according to John, Jesus mixes his spit with dirt to make mud, which he then puts on the blind man's eyes.

Maybe if the blind man had known what was being put on his eyes, he would have tried to stop Jesus from doing that!

Imagine being blind and sitting by the side of the road and hearing someone say, "Teacher, was this guy born blind because his parents sinned, or because he sinned?"

I am sure the blind man was very familiar with this question. It was the prevailing thinking of the time that anything bad that happened was because someone sinned. He probably thought something like, "Hoo boy, here we go again."

Not only were people going to stand right in front of him and talk about him as if he were deaf as well as blind, but he was going to have to hear about God's wrath and punishment and the kind of thinking that leads to saying "There but for the grace of God go I."

The man was born blind, so it couldn't really be him that had sinned. It must have been his parents if it was anyone. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons, or so the saying goes.

But Jesus disputes that popular notion, and answers, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned. This man was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.”

No one who heard that answer would have been more surprised than the blind man himself! How were God’s works going to be revealed in him? What was about to happen?

There was a pause and some strange noises that sounded like someone stirring around in the dirt, and then something was being put on top of his eyes, something wet but much heavier than water.

Something that stuck to his eyelids. It smelled like dirt, kind of muddy, but there was also a smell of something else, some whiff of a fish lunch maybe.

Was something happening? I wonder what it felt like to have that paste on his eyelids. Was there tingling or burning or any kind of sensation as the healing took place?

And then he heard a kind voice say, "Go and wash in the pool of Siloam."

The blind man probably thought something like, "Well, thanks, I guess. You put this gunk on my eyelids and then I have to get up and somehow find my way to Siloam. Hello? I'm blind!! How am I supposed to find my way there?"

But I will go. I need to get this mud off of me. I may be blind, but I try to keep myself clean!”

And he went, and he washed, and as he dried his face he realized---HE WAS SEEING!

He had no idea who had touched him. He hadn't asked to be healed. He heard the man say that God's works would be revealed in him, but I don't think he had expected to SEE!

Some of his neighbors and others who knew him didn't even recognize him because they had only known him as “That blind beggar.”

They asked him where Jesus was and he didn't know.

The more people he told about the spit, the mud, and being healed from blindness, the more sure he became that the man who healed him was from God

---first he referred to Jesus as a prophet, then as someone sent by God, and finally he came to believe in him as the Son of Man, in other words, the Messiah.

The man formerly known as blind was deserted by his family and friends because they were all afraid to go against the Pharisees. They didn't want to be barred from the Temple.

The Pharisees themselves were divided over this.

Some said Jesus was a sinner because he had healed on the Sabbath. Others among them believed that only someone sent by God could heal a man born blind.

When Jesus talks to the Pharisees, he tells them that when they say they see, they don't. Only people who recognize their own blindness, their own faults, can see.

Those who are self-righteous are blind to their own need of God.

This story of spit, mud, and blindness is more than the story of one man's healing. It's more than just another lecture Jesus gives to the Pharisees that they just don't quite get.

It's about all of us, the way that we are healed from our own blindness, and the way that we need Jesus in our lives.

It's also about grace.

Even without asking, Jesus comes to us and offers to heal us. We can be just sitting by the side of the road, minding our own business, doing the best we can to get through another day, earning a living the best way we know how,

and Jesus will come along and mix his spit in the dirt to make mud, and put it on our blind spot, wanting to heal us.

Spit, representing water, coming from Jesus,

is an act of giving on his part---a part of himself given to heal us of our blindness. Coming from Christ who is fully human and fully divine at the same time, it is an intimate connection between us and Christ.

The spit is added to the dirt from which we were made and to which we shall return. This dirt also connects us to Christ, who became flesh and blood, made of the same stuff that we are.

And when we are connected so intimately to Jesus by spit and mud which are connected to both the divine and the earthly,

When the spit and the mud are put on our weakest places, the places where we are blind, we are not automatically or immediately healed.

There is something that we have to do---we have to go wash in the pool of Siloam.

God, in Christ, takes action, reaches out to us and touches our blind spots in an intimate way, makes that connection with us

And then we have to respond by doing what he told us to do---go and wash that spit and mud off.

So what does this all mean?

John Wesley called it “prevenient grace.” Prevenient means “going before”. Prevenient grace is the grace that God extends to us before we know we need it. Before we ask for help and healing, God offers that to us.

Just as the blind man sat by the side of the road and Christ put the spit and mud on his eyes without being asked, Christ offers us grace and healing and restoration to wholeness before we even ask.

But Wesley also knew that unless and until we respond, the healing doesn't happen.

If we just sit there with that spit and mud on our eyes, it will just dry up. No healing will take place. No change will happen.

We have to go and wash in the pool of Siloam.

We have to get up and do what Christ is telling us to do!

We have to behave as though we believe! We have to get up and do something in response to Christ's sacrifice of himself,

We have to get up and act like we believe we want to be healed, get up and admit that we need Christ's healing, God's forgiveness. Confess that we want a relationship with God

Because if we don't, we will still be blind.

We will still be the same as we have been since birth, blind to the love and power of God.

If we don't respond and go to wash off that spit and mud, we will stay in our blindness.

On this communion Sunday, we come to Christ's table asking for and receiving forgiveness. The invitation will be made to come. Our response is to receive the bread and the cup with open hands.

During the sacrament, some pastors have the people tear off the bread themselves to symbolize that this is the response we make to God's offer of grace.

When I serve communion, I tear off the bread and put it into your hands. This symbolizes the gift of God's grace which is yours simply because you have come to receive it.

Both ways are okay. There is no right and wrong here.

I choose the method I use because God meets us much more than halfway, and to me, when you come to the rail and open your hand to take the bread and put it into your mouth, you have gone to wash in the pool of Siloam.

Christ has broken the bread, God has blessed it, and it has been offered to you. All you have to do is take it from there, and do what Christ has told you to do---take and eat, take and drink.

And you will be healed of your blindness.

Why were we all born blind? Not because we sinned and not because our parents sinned, but so that the works of God may be revealed in us. So that God will heal us, restore us to the wholeness that God desires for us.

So that we may glorify God and come to believe that Christ is both from God and is God.

Great is the mystery, the grace, and the power of God eternal.

Amen.