

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 26, 2017

A One-Act Play in Six Scenes

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John 9:1-41

I did not read the scripture for today's message before the sermon as I usually do. The full scripture reading this morning is long, 41 verses which is a lot to listen to in one reading. The scripture reading, John 9:1-41 is a one-act play which tells a story in six scenes. It has a large cast of characters --- Jesus, a blind man, the disciples, neighbors, parents, bystanders, and the Pharisees.

Each of the six scenes could make a sermon in itself but, rather than doing that, I want to show you the entire play. For clarity I will read the scripture separately for each of the six scenes.

Scene 1: ¹*As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.* ²*His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

³*"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.* ⁴*As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.* ⁵*While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."*

⁶*After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes.* ⁷*"Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.*

Here we have Jesus healing a blind man. That in itself is not all that unusual. Jesus has healed many people of various maladies but in this case he did it on the Sabbath. What was unusual was what happened afterward.

In the culture of the times, people attributed the man's blindness to sin, and since he had been born blind, the sin was that of the parents. The belief was that the man's blindness was God's retribution for the sins of the parents. That of course was not true and was not accepted by Jesus. He saw a man with a problem and used it to show God's love and works by curing the man of his blindness.

That was what the healing was intended for and could have been the end of the story, but it wasn't. Jesus cures the man and leaves and the story continues without him.

Scene 2: ⁸ *His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?"* ⁹ *Some claimed that he was.*

Others said, "No, he only looks like him."

But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

¹⁰ *"How then were your eyes opened?" they asked.*

¹¹ *He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."*

¹² *"Where is this man?" they asked him.*

"I don't know," he said.

This scene happens when the man returns home. He is bombarded with questions. His friends and neighbors are clearly disturbed over his healing. They want to know how and why he was healed. After all, the blindness was the result of sin. How then could he have been cured? How could the sin have been absolved? They argue and debate but notice that there is not expression of joy or any praise to God. There is no apparent thankfulness at the man's cure.

Scene 3: ¹³ *They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind.* ¹⁴ *Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath.* ¹⁵ *Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."*

¹⁶ *Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."*

But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided.

¹⁷ *Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened."*

The man replied, "He is a prophet."

The scene is a trial. The man has been hauled before the authorities, the Pharisees. They seem to care only that he was cured on the Sabbath. In their eyes, the act of curing him was a crime and he was an accomplice to the crime. They wanted to know who cured the man so that they could arrest him. They did not care that the man had been cured. They cared only for their rules, not the blind man.

Scene 4: ¹⁸ *They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents.* ¹⁹ *"Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"*

²⁰ *"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind.* ²¹ *But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself."* ²² *His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.* ²³ *That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."*

The Pharisees needed to be sure that a crime had really been committed, that the man really had been blind, so they brought in his parents to quiz them. The parents were afraid and really did not want to be involved. They simply said, *"He is of age; ask him."* He can speak for himself.

Unfortunately Jesus' act to help the man had divided the man from his family. He was alone.

Scene 5: ²⁴ *A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."*

²⁵ *He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"*

²⁶ *Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"*

²⁷ *He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"*

²⁸ *Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses!"* ²⁹ *We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."*

³⁰ *The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.* ³¹ *We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will.* ³² *Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.* ³³ *If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."*

³⁴ *To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.*

The Pharisees again interrogated the man. They are angry and wanted answers but all the man could say was that he had been blind and had been cured through the power of God.

The Pharisees were put in a real bind. There is no denying that the man had been cured. They had to accept that fact and that the healer was a person of God. The catch-22 was that the man had been cured on the Sabbath. The law had been broken.

They rejected both the man and his healer and threw the man out. They excommunicated him through no fault of his own. He had not asked to be cured and now was suffering because of it. As one commentary that I have said, *“Good news has its enemies.”*

Scene 6: ³⁵ *Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”*

³⁶ *“Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”*

³⁷ *Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”*

³⁸ *Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.*

³⁹ *Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”*

⁴⁰ *Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”*

⁴¹ *Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.*

This last scene has Jesus returning. The man confesses his faith in Jesus and the Pharisees are revealed for who they really are. *“Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness rather than light ... ”* (John 3:19).

“The healing has made it clear: light comes to those who recognize that life is blindness without Christ; darkness comes to those who without Christ claim to see.” ⁽¹⁾

Amen.

(1) Fred B. Craddock, et al, Preaching Through the Christian Year – Year A, Trinity Press International, Philadelphia, 1992. (Note: much of this sermon is a paraphrase of this reference.)