

March 30, 2014

### Psalm 23

<sup>1</sup>The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

<sup>3</sup>he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup>Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

**John 9:1-41 The Message (MSG)** Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?” Jesus said, “You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world’s Light.” He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man’s eyes, and said, “Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam” (Siloam means “Sent”). The man went and washed—and saw. <sup>8</sup> Soon the town was buzzing. His relatives and those who year after year had seen him as a blind man begging were saying, “Why, isn’t this the man we knew, who sat here and begged?” Others said, “It’s him all right!” But others objected, “It’s not the same man at all. It just looks like him.” He said, “It’s me, the very one.” They said, “How did your eyes get opened?” “A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ I did what he said. When I washed, I saw.” <sup>12</sup> “So where is he?” “I don’t know.”

### Sermon: IN-SIGHTS

How is your eyesight? How many of you have 20/20 vision without glasses? Visual acuity is often taken for granted by those who have it. Words on the page are clear, faces across the room are recognizable, and you can see your alarm clock in the morning. Something you do not know about me is I started wearing glasses at 7 years old and a patch over my left eye around the same time. If I had been more confident, I would have dressed up like a pirate. Kids would have laughed with me not at me. Anyway, I do not remember much more than embarrassment.

Decades of Glasses, contacts and finally bifocals led me to corrective eye surgery in 2006. One of the reasons I began preaching without notes is I could not shift from looking at you to the page with my bifocals. For 24 hours, my eyes were bandaged covered and I was in the dark. Thank God, I was sedated because the stinging pain was horrible. My world needed to be small and safe for a day. However, when I awoke the next day, I was amazed. After decades of groping for my glasses to see the alarm clock, I could see the numbers. I could see my toes. I could see the faces of my family coming into my room. For me, it was a small miracle. Moreover, I gained insight and compassion for those who are having visual disabilities.

Like five-year old Jonah who had surgery last week. The first thing I noticed was his eyes were swollen shut and he wanted to rub his eyes back open. Temporary blindness is difficult enough for an adult, but for a child is must be very scary. Both his father and mother were close by soothing and comforting him with assuring words and touch. The swelling in Jonah’s eyes will decrease and he will be able to open them again soon. However, he will also know in his deepest soul that his parents loved him and stayed by him in the darkness.

Like Psalm 23 assures us, God is shepherding that little boy and restoring his soul. Both the Gospel and the Psalm assures us that God travels with us through darkness and light. In the classic Psalm 23, God like a good shepherd leads, comforts and reconciles us. Metaphors and images of green pastures and peaceful streams of water refresh and restore our souls. At heavenly meal mercy and grace overflow,

reconciling us to friend and foe alike. Dwelling in the House of the Lord Now and forever takes on new meaning when you consider Psalm 23 as a daily prayer, not just a funeral or crisis psalm. It deals with our blind spots when it comes to reconciling with people you resent or even hate. Reconciling forgiveness is required in this decade not reserved for later.

Casting a blind eye, Being Blind sighted are modern-day terms for our own spiritual and emotional blindness. That is why John chapter 9 is the focus of this sermon. There the obvious miracle of physical sight and the greater miracle of spiritual insight.

First, the disciples are blind as bats when they began their discussion, trying to place blame on the man or the parents, "Whose sin caused this man to be born blind? This is not a compassionate approach; the disciples are defining this man by his disease. They are blind to him as a human being. Jesus answer is marvelous! "Neither! Neither the man or the parents cause this man's blindness."

In the Eugene Peterson's translation of John 9:2 *Jesus said, "You're asking the wrong question. You are looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world's Light."*

LOOK For what God Can DO! When you encounter problems in your life, illness, financial problems, family crisis, do not waste your time placing blame, finding fault. Put your energy into working with God, for what is good, what is life giving and filled with God's Light.

The survey for the church asks, "Describe the church using five words." What is God doing here, now, in this congregation? Jesus constantly worked to make things better, shedding light on each situation. He opened up the disciples' eyes when he discarded the "cause and effect" theology of Exodus, which said, sins would be passed down from generation to generation.

Then he places a salve of mud and saliva on the man's eyes and told him to wash in the Pool of Siloam (which means Sent). Now for most of us sighted individuals, we would have a tough time walking down to Seneca Lake blindfolded. But, for a person who has been navigating by other senses, it was probably a piece of cake. Therefore, the first insights have to do with the theology of hospitality and healing. Jesus was willing to break the rules by inviting the outcast into the inner circle. In addition, he redefined healing as mind, body and soul. Jesus treats the whole person; God sees the all of who you are and loves you. What may seem like a disability to society is not a problem for Christ.

A radio personality and musician at one of my former churches stopped by my office right after my sermon on the Jesus' healing of the blind man. Bob said, "I have a true story and new insights into being sighted and blind." My friend who was an extraordinary man and talented musician. John was blind from birth and quiet independent. In fact, he lived on his family's farm and drove the tractor with some directions from me. Right, left and stop before you run over the cat. One day as dusk darkened the rows of corn, I called out Tom, and it's time to quit for the evening." By the time, we put the equipment away, it was pitch dark. As I carefully made my way into the farmhouse, Tom moved agilely through the kitchen to the living room never switching on a light. After several encounters with doors, hard tables and a wall, I cried out in pain, "Tom, I could use some light here." Tom laughed and said, "Feeling a little disabled?" His point opened my eyes to my own blindness. Tom was not sighted but he could find his way in the darkness, unlike me who groped around. Tom and Bob gained great insights from each other, they were not sighted and unsighted, and they were differently gifted.

The second insight is this; God does not rate us by our disabilities or even by our abilities. God accepts as we are and loves us as we grow in our faith and relationships. The real miracle is how we respond to

God. The miraculous healing of this man's sight is not as important as his response. Throughout chapter nine, he becomes incrementally confident. His answers to inquisitive Pharisees and unbelieving neighbors become longer and more profound.

First, the neighbors do not believe he is the same man; neighbors who have seen him every day since he was little hardly recognize him. He witnesses to Jesus healing him. Then the Pharisees question him about his identity and the details of his healing. They press him to identify Jesus, *They came back at the blind man, "You're the expert. He opened your eyes. What do you say about him?" He said, "He is a prophet."* Unsatisfied with the grown man's answer, the leaders interrogate his parents. The parents confirm their son's identity but they are fearful of repercussions so they refuse to say Jesus is healing agent. "Treat our son as an adult"

And, he does speak up for himself as an adult quite aptly even defiantly. "Haven't you been listening?" The man replied, "This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes! It's well known that God isn't at the beck and call of sinners, but listens carefully to anyone who lives in reverence and does his will. That someone opened the eyes of a man born blind has never been heard of—ever. If this man didn't come from God, he wouldn't be able to do anything."

With that, the Pharisees turn nasty, trying to put the man back in his place, *"You're nothing but dirt! How dare you take that tone with us!" Then they threw him out in the street. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him.* Jesus was out of the picture for the longest time and when he comes back to care for the man he healed there is a new relationship between them. Jesus treats the cast-out man the same way he treats his disciples. "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.

The man who once sat begging at the road, now followed Jesus along the road. His belief in Christ, his witness to his healing inspired generations to write about their own spiritual sight restored. The Message Jesus leaves us with is a message of hope. That all "who have never seen will see". He also, leaves us with the challenge to open the eyes of our hearts, "for those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind." Some of the Pharisees could see Jesus point and asked, "Are we blind or spiritually unsighted?"

Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound, that saved a soul like me, I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.