

# **I Was Blind But Now I See**

**Genesis 3: 1-24**

**John 9: 1 – 9: 13-17; 28-41**

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**Babcock Presbyterian Church**

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Last week's sermon was based on the story in John's gospel about Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. It was also about Jesus disregarding laws keeping him and us from loving God and each other.

For example, when Jesus took a shortcut through Samaria, he broke the law about keeping clear of the people who lived there. Another example, Jesus broke all the rules when he spoke in public to that Samaritan woman, who broke all the rules about marriage.

Jesus never followed any law keeping him from being compassionate and generous. When challenged, he'd say it wasn't his intention to destroy the law. Just the opposite, Jesus came to fulfill the law through his death and resurrection.

Today's story from John's Gospel carries on this theme of rule breaking, but this time Jesus was caught in the act, causing the religious leaders to suffer a self-righteous meltdown. Their behavior exposed everything wrong with any organized religion holding the letter of the law in higher regard than the spirit of the law.

According to John, this time Jesus got into trouble for healing a blind man on the Sabbath. According to the Pharisees, keeping the Lord's Day holy meant no work with no exceptions. Not even carrying out necessary tasks, like healing someone with a broken leg was permitted. Only when the Sabbath was over could the doctoring begin.

Today we ask why anyone supported these laws. They had their reasons. The original intent of the Law of Moses was to insure the holiness of God's people by setting them apart from their numerous pagan neighbors. In fact, the Hebrew word for holy means, "set apart," set apart for a holy purpose, to be a light to all the nations.

The religious leaders knew from experience it was all too easy for God's people to stray into Gentile customs and religions. But despite their good intentions, Jesus rejected both their motives and methods, especially since the Pharisees mistakenly believed God would never send his Messiah until the Jews proved themselves worthy by keeping the Law. Their legalistic minds couldn't grasp the Messiah would come precisely because a savior was necessary to love us into God's kingdom.

The Pharisees believed keeping the law was their only salvation. Why else would Jesus consistently and publicly break the law? Contrary to what the Pharisees thought, Jesus wasn't a rebel without a cause. They couldn't see that by breaking the law Jesus was trying to show them God doesn't expect moral perfection since human perfection is an impossible goal. Accepting

God's grace and striving to live by faith as if the kingdom is already here, that's all that God requires of us.

“Repent, turn from your sins and accept God's forgiveness. The kingdom of God is at hand.”

Even for long time believers, this is really a hard concept to grasp, especially since we've been taught since childhood we must work to earn approval, first from our parents, then our teachers, our neighbors and even God. And when we fall short and don't earn someone's approval, that's when we take a deep breath and find other ways to step up our efforts. But try as we might, we still never seem to make it.

To compensate, some people set out to make more money than they need, others try to make themselves the center of attention so they can look important, while still others try to make themselves appear wiser and more authoritative than they really are. These are all ill-stared attempts to let the universe know you exist.

One of the themes of John's Gospel is Jesus being born into the world to lead us out of the darkness and into the light. Once in the light, we can see how all our achievements put together always lead to a dead end. Only in the light can we see we've been freed from proving our self worth, because God already loves us.

This truth inspired John to write, “For God so loved the world he sent his only begotten son, so that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” John also wrote Jesus didn't come to condemn us but to save us. From what? Certainly our sin but also false notions keeping us from being loved by God and ourselves.

The storyline of Jesus healing the blind man is straightforward. After seeing a blind man begging in the temple, Jesus instructed his disciples to fetch him while he mixed a concoction of mud and spit to smear over his eyes. Notice the blind man didn't come to Jesus, instead he was literally snatched up and dragged to Jesus against his will. You can almost hear him begging Jesus not to touch his eyes when Jesus rubbed on the sticky mud.

Ironically, the blind man's restoration of sight caused the Pharisees to lose their's. They were so fixated on keeping the law they couldn't see the end result of this healing, the power of God alleviating human suffering. Making matters worse, the Pharisees rejected anything Jesus did simply because Jesus refused to the knuckle under their authority.

The Pharisees' rivalry with Jesus reminds me of the jealousy and intrigue found in the movie *Amadeus*, the story of Mozart being frustrated by the mediocre musical establishment in Vienna ganging up against him.

The emperor's elite court musicians, threatened by the young Mozart's musical genius did everything they could to sabotage Mozart's career. Despite their short term success, two centuries later we remember and celebrate Mozart and not them.

Likewise, once they got their hands on him, the Pharisees attempted to discredit Jesus by getting the once blind man to confess he conspired with Jesus to pull off a hoax. Despite threats of excommunication, the man refused to change his story saying only, "One thing I do know, once I was blind, but now I see."

For his truth telling, the man was driven out from the temple. When Jesus heard about this, he went out looking for him. When found, Jesus asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man answered, "And who is he, sir?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he."

The man said, "Lord, I believe," and worshiped him.

Then 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."

When some of the Pharisees heard Jesus say these things to the man, trying to justify themselves they asked, "Surely we are not blind, are we?"

It's easy to criticize the Pharisees for being blind, not being able to see God working through Jesus' ministry of signs and wonders. (By the way, John always called Jesus' miracles signs and wonders, indelible clues pointing to God's power and glory breaking through the veil of eternity into our world.)

Anyway, like the Pharisees we too are blinded by our own preconceived notions. As I said earlier, we've been conditioned to prove ourselves to each other and that spills over into our need to prove ourselves to God because deep down we know fall short.

Earlier in the story, the disciples asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"

Even today, many believe that another's misfortune is payback for sin. They call it karma, which is a Hindu, but not a biblical teaching.

That explains Jesus' answer to the disciples' question. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned."

Jesus didn't mean to say they were sinless. He did mean the man's blindness wasn't karma, or the consequence of sin.

Jesus continued, "... he was born blind so God's works might be revealed in him... as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Let's be clear about this, Jesus didn't say God allowed this man to be born blind to prove a point. That's a cruel misinterpretation. God never singles out anyone for hardship to step in at the right moment and save the day. All we can say is that human suffering is one of the eternal

mysteries defying any logical explanation and won't be fully answered until we see God face-to-face.

We can also say this: Jesus came into this world for "judgment so that those who do not see may see..."

That word "judgment" frightens us because we think the worst, until we remember Jesus didn't come to condemn but to save. When the scales fall off our eyes because Jesus touched us and we say, "Lord I believe," you are judged worthy in God's eyes.

The season of Lent is designed to be a time for us slow down and contemplate our humanity. Although we are created in the image of God we are reminded, "for dust you are and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:19)

This was God's parting words to Adam and Eve after they were cast out of the Garden of Eden. We are Adam and we are Eve. We are still God's children but we are now estranged from God because of our disobedience.

During Lent we are encouraged to ponder our broken humanity in the light of Christ, trusting in God's promise that we are not a lost cause. We are still loved and precious in God's eyes.

The proof for this claim? It's found in the gospels. God became one of us to redeem the world suffering on the cross and being raised from the dead. His passion guaranteed the eventual return of God's Kingdom to earth.

Another way of putting it, through Christ, Eden's gates have been reopened wide, allowing us to reenter that loving, intimate relationship Adam and Eve enjoyed with God before their fall into sin.

Get it out of your heads that Lent is a time to earn your salvation. Praying harder, doing good works and keeping the Ten Commandments won't impress God. All God wants from us is honesty and trust. Rip off your masks, allow yourself to be vulnerable, confess your sins and wait for God's grace to heal you make you whole.

Do this and your fear of God Will be transformed into your awe of God and the amazing grace we find in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you ever find yourself thinking God could never forgive you for anything you did, think again. The hymn Amazing Grace was written by a former slave trader named John Newton. He was responsible for capturing thousands of Africans and bringing them over to America on slave ships. Forced to live in horrible conditions, thousands died and were thrown overboard into the ocean. If someone as wretched as John Newton could repent and experienced God's amazing grace, surely you and I can be saved as well.

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see."