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John 9: 1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' 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, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 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?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' 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.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 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.' 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. So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.' 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.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' 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?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshiped him. 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.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.

SERMON:

'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' Jesus told his disciples. This light that Jesus speaks of embodying here - it's a kind of light that transcends both wave and particle, illuminating the inner world for those able to see, to truly see. This light Jesus speaks of has nothing to do with physical sight.

Light, inner light, found in the darkness, is beautifully described by Jacques Lusseyran (Lucy-raun), a blind French resistance fighter who wrote about his experience in a memoir called *And There Was Light*.¹ Lusseyran was born sighted, though fitted with glasses while he was still quite young. He was an ordinary boy full of zest and mischief. During a schoolroom scuffle he had a freak accident, falling hard against the corner of his teacher's desk. When he awoke in the hospital several days later, his right eye was gone and the left was beyond repair. At the age of seven he was completely and permanently blind.

In those days blind people were often swept to the margins of society. Lusseyran's doctors suggested sending him to a residential school for the blind but his parents refused, wanting their son to stay in the local public school where he could learn to function in the seeing world. His mother learned Braille right alongside him, advocating fiercely for his integration into society. The best thing his parents did for him, he writes, was never to pity him. They never described him as "unfortunate." They were not among those who spoke of the "night" into which his blindness had pushed him.

Not long after his accident his father, who deeply understood the spiritual life, said, "Jacques, always tell us when you discover something."

What an act of seeing, truly seeing, his son!

In this way Lusseyran learned that he was not a poor blind boy but the discoverer of a new world in which the light outside of him moved inside to show him things he might never have found any other way.

¹ [Light without sight | The Christian Century](#)

Barely ten days after his accident he made a discovery that entranced him for the rest of his life. He wrote. "I had completely lost the sight of my eyes; I could not see the light of the world anymore. Yet the light was still there."

"Its source was not obliterated, he goes on - I felt it gushing forth every moment and brimming over; I felt how it wanted to spread out over the world. I had only to receive it. It was unavoidably there...

He continues: The source of light is not in the outer world. We believe that it is only because of a common delusion. The light dwells where life also dwells: within ourselves." (from *Against the Pollution of the I*)

With practice, he learned to attend so carefully to the world around him that he confounded his friends by describing things he could not see. He could tell trees apart by the sounds of their shadows. He could tell how tall or wide a wall was by the pressure it exerted on his body.

Have I ever paid attention to the sounds of shadows before?

The problem with seeing the regular way, writes Lusseyan, is that sight attends to the surface of things, which makes it an essentially superficial sense. We let our eyes skid over trees, furniture, traffic, faces, too often mistaking sight for truly seeing.

"Since becoming blind, I have paid more attention to a thousand things," he writes.

One of his greatest discoveries was how the light he saw changed with his inner condition.

When he was sad or afraid the light decreased at once. Sometimes it went out altogether, leaving him deeply and truly blind. When he was joyful and attentive it returned as strong as ever. He learned very quickly that the best way to see the inner light and remain in its presence was to love.

The inner light was intimately connected to love.

In January 1944, then not quite 20 years old, the Nazis captured Lusseyan and shipped him to Buchenwald along with 2,000 of his countrymen. There he learned how hate worked against him, not only darkening his world but making it smaller as well. When he let himself become consumed with anger he started running into things, slamming into walls and tripping over furniture. When he called himself back to attention, however, the space both inside and outside of him opened up so that he found his way and moved with ease again. The most valuable thing he learned was that no one could turn out the light inside him without his consent. Even when he lost track of it for a while he knew where he could find it again.

A light that shines forth when he is open to love.

That sounds like the light Jesus speaks of.

Our scripture (found on page 871 in your pew bible) starts out with Jesus seeing a man, a man who happens to be blind.

His disciples don't appear to see him, as a person, but as a condition, asking:

'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'

Who sinned?

9 times we hear sin or sinner in this passage.

What is sin here?

My eyes were opened this week as I learned about how the writer of this gospel understood sin, judgment and salvation.

Outside of John's gospel, the rest of the New Testament tends to understand sin as a moral action. Sin refers to ways people act, or refrain from acting, in ways that are contrary to the will of God. Elsewhere, sin relates to how we respond to God's direction, law, purposes.

But John's gospel has a different understanding of sin.²

To dig in, let's step back into the first chapter of John (1:29), where we're told Jesus 'takes away the sin of the world'.

Jesus' coming, in the flesh, gave the world access to the light and love of God.

Let me say that again - Jesus in the flesh, incarnate, *is* God's light and love in the world.

Here, in John, Jesus takes away the world's sin by making it possible for the world to redefine its relationship with God.

For this reason, the word 'sin' occurs almost exclusively in the singular in this gospel. The world's sin is its refusal to be in relationship with Jesus, the Word incarnate. The world's sin is not believing in Jesus for who he is - God in the flesh.

² *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX, 1995. Abingdon Press, Nashville. Pages 664-665.

In John's gospel, sin is fundamentally about one's relationship with God, and here, the decisive measure of one's relationship with God is one's faith, or belief, or trust, in Jesus.

Sin occurs in response to Jesus.

Judgment is not based on what people do, as the disciples and the Pharisees assumed, but on people's embrace of God in Jesus.

If the Pharisees, the crowd, the listeners of our story today had not been given the opportunity to see, then they would not be blind. But because they have seen Jesus' works and still refuse to believe, to trust, that he is God here among them, they remain in sin.

For again, sin is about one's relationship with God - seeing Jesus for who he is, the manifestation of Love.

Those in our gospel story - who sinned? Who didn't see the Love of God, there among them?

Who sinned?

Was it those who didn't see the man born blind as a person - one who was more than a person without sight? Who didn't see him as a reflection of God's love in the world?

Who sinned?

Nowhere in this story do we hear shouts of gratitude for the gift of sight. Nowhere was this man welcomed into a new way of being in his community. No thanksgiving; no hospitality and making space for new life. No, the man who was marginalized by lack of sight is now cast out - unbelonging meets him in a new way.

Who sinned?

Those who were so caught up in doing religion the 'right' way that they missed the love in action right in front of them?

Who was living in darkness here?

Jacques Lusseyran, that courageous man who shares the secret gifts of his blindness writes: "If we could learn to be attentive every moment of our lives, we would discover the world anew. We would discover that the world is completely different from what we had believed it to be."³

Take a moment. Where do you find yourself in this story?

When have you failed to see the Love of God, here among us?

PAUSE

What's the Good News; the invitation here for us?

How might we access that inner light, that light that shines brightest when we live out of a place of love?

Jesus came that we might be free - free from the darkness, inviting us to see God in all.

How might we discover the world anew? Living out of that place of open-hearted love?

What do you see?

³ IBID.