

John 9:1-12, 35-41

#### MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

In the middle nineteenth century, the State of New York wanted to put a suspension bridge across the Niagara River gorge, linking Canada with the United States. Thus, a kite-flying contest was sponsored by the bridge construction project. The sole purpose of the contest was to get a line across the river in a section where the gorge was very deep and could not be navigated due to the incredible rapids. Once over the river, the kite line was to be used to pull across increasingly heavier and stronger lines until a steel cable could be drawn across. Once a steel cable was in place, construction methods of the day would provide an opportunity to construct the bridge from this single cable, which would be used as a transport line for other cables and materials. Homan Walsh, who was fifteen year of age, took up the challenge along with many other adults and children; after all, the \$10.00 prize was a princely sum in those days. In January of 1848, Homan Walsh successfully flew his kite from the Canadian side to the U. S. side. When his kite fluttered to a landing, the line was secured and the process of hauling over increasingly stronger lines was undertaken according to the plan.

I use that story to introduce the lesson from Johns Gospel concerning the man, who was born blind, and his developing relationship with Jesus. Like the Samaritan woman and her encounter with Jesus (in John 4), this man also experienced an ever-deepening faith as he talked with Jesus. He soon realized that there was more than meets the eye with regard to Jesus, and his faith grew and grew, stronger and stronger.

After Jesus had applied mud to the blind mans eyes and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam, and when he did just that, he returned able to see. His neighbors argued whether he was the same blind man they knew. When he told them he was one and the same, they asked, How were your eyes opened? He said it was due to the actions of the man called Jesus. The neighbors brought the man before the Pharisees for questioning, especially since he had been healed on the sabbath. They asked him to recap what had happened and he told them. When the Pharisees asked his opinion of Jesus, the former blind man responded, He is a prophet. The Pharisees interrogated the mans parents for more clues as to what had happened, but the parents sidestepped their questioning by saying, Ask him yourself; hes old enough to be accountable! The Pharisees brought the man back in and tired to pressure him into agreeing that Jesus was a sinner for healing on the sabbath. The man answered, I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see. One thing led to another and the Pharisees ultimately kicked the man out of the synagogue.

Jesus found the man and asked him a direct question, Do you believe in the Son of Man? The man asked Jesus Who is he so that I may believe in him. Jesus looked him straight in the eyes and said to him, You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he. He said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped Jesus.

Did you hear in that recounting of the story from John 9 how the blind-but-now-I-see person first spoke about the man called Jesus, who had healed him. Then, under heavy questioning from the Pharisees concerning Jesus, the man said, He is a prophet. Finally, as he grew in his relationship and involvement with Jesus, he was moved to profess, Lord, I believe. Besides the mans developing and

ever-deepening faith in Jesus, there are other features to note within this biblical story.

When the disciples asked Jesus, Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus didnt answer the question because no one was to blame.

Somehow, good and bad things happen to all people sometimes due to choices made and/or actions taken, and, at other times, because of natural occurrences. But, God does not cause suffering how do we know that? we only have to look at Jesus (God in the flesh) to see how he interacted with people out of great love and compassion. When you see Jesus at work in the world, then you know - thats what God is really like!

Jesus didnt offer an easy answer or an explanation, in which finite minds couldnt possibly grasp the mind of God. What Jesus did instead (and what he continues to do even now), was he offered himself. And, even though Jesus was absent from most of the chapter, he was there when it counted when the man was healed and after the man had been excommunicated from the synagogue. The rest of the time, Jesus was there in Spirit. Here is God at work standing with us, reaching out to us, God with us and for us. And that is better in our times of pain than any kind of answer. Instead of asking, Why? Jesus turned the question into a What now? and he proceeded to seize the opportunity at hand by doing Gods work of healing. Jesus sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam and the man was healed. As the former blind mans faith in Jesus expanded, and their relationship grew, the religious leaders went in the opposite direction. Rather than focus on the divine miracle of the mans healing, the Pharisees saw a theological problem, a point to be debated, since Jesus had healed the blind man on the sabbath. They became more and more obstinate toward Jesus This man is not from God! How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs? We can sense Johns enjoyment in telling this story; it drips with irony - the blind man could see with both physical sight and faithful insight whereas the Pharisees were blinded by their own sinfulness. In the previous chapter, Jesus said, I am the light of the world! However, many of the Pharisees were unable to see and celebrate Gods shining light in their very midst due to the darkness of their own sins.

Finally, as we must realize, this story of the man born blind sneaks up on us and becomes our story. We see ourselves reflected in these pages of holy writ. We too can identify with the man, who said (and, as we will sing), I once was blind but now I see. By grace, we too have had our eyes opened to him, and by him, who is our Lord Jesus.

And, if we have eyes to see with, we will see that there is more to us than meets the eye! Whereas people see only our outer appearance, which can be quite pleasant, we can see inwardly and we know that deep down there is darkness inside of us. If we truly worship God in spirit and in truth, then, we confess that we can readily identify with the Pharisees; we too are blinded by our own insensitivities and sins. We too make harsh judgments about whos in or out, who is acceptable to us and who is not. And, it is no surprise that those we condemn do not look like us or act like us; they are different from us and thats all we need to decide against them. Or, there is the darkness of our negative attitudes toward others; we fall into the trap of trying to raise ourselves up by cutting others down. Deep down inside of us, where we really live, it is quite dark and sinful.

Thats the bad news. Heres the good news: Jesus sees us both as we are and as we can become. Furthermore, he is still the light of the world, and his light shines in our darkness, and our darkness cannot overcome his light. When we recognize and repent of the creeping darkness in our souls, his light both

penetrates and dispels the darkness. Christ Jesus heals us and makes us whole just like he did for the man born blind!

Kenneth Filkins tells the story about a man who fell into a deep, dark pit. He hears many different individuals and groups tell him how to get out of the pit. For example, Buddha said, Your pit is only a state of mind. A Hindu said, This pit is for purging you and making you more perfect. A federal bureaucrat asked, Have you paid your taxes on that pit? A county inspector asked, Have you a permit for that pit? Filkins concludes with the actions of Jesus: Jesus seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit. (Source unknown) That story is also about us! On the cross, Jesus reached out his hands to us, while, at the same time, he cried out, saying, Father, forgive them! And now, from the Table, he speaks to us saying, You are forgiven, sisters and brothers. Come to me, for you are weary and are carrying heavy burdens. I have removed the darkness from within you. Live in my light, and I will give you rest. Let us go to him, grow more and more in him, and let us do the work of God all to the glory of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Randall C. Stevens

First Presbyterian Church/Martinsville, VA

March 2, 2008