

SERMON
“The Blind Man: Grace for the Blind”
John 9:1-7, 24-38
Sunday, March 5, 2023

The keynote speaker was in such a hurry to get to the venue that when he arrived and sat down at the head table, he suddenly realized that he had forgotten his dentures. Turning to the man next to him, he whispered, “I forgot my teeth!”

The man said, “No problem.” With that he reached into his briefcase and pulled out a pair of dentures. “Try these,” he said.

The speaker tried them. “Too loose,” he said.

The man dug around in his briefcase again. “Here, try these.”

The speaker tried them and responded. “Too tight.”

The man didn’t seem taken aback at all. He dug around in his briefcase again. “Here, I have this pair. Give them a try.”

The speaker smiled. “They fit perfectly.” He ate his meal and gave his speech without any further troubles.

After the event concluded, the speaker went over to thank his benefactor and return the spare parts. “I want to thank you for coming to my rescue. Where is your office? I’ve been looking for a good dentist.”

“Oh, I’m not a dentist,” the man replied. “I’m the local funeral director.”

Like the speaker saved by the dentures of a dead man, our biblical passage for this morning tells the story of a blind man saved by grace. His story compels us to look more closely at our own stories of blindness in fear, and how we too come to trust the healing grace that Jesus brings for our lives and for the lives of all people everywhere. Theologian Michael Hoy says that *“The contrast in this story is between seeing and being blind, between living in the light as opposed to walking in darkness. When we are blind,”* says Hoy, *“We are mired in the darkness of our unbelief and fear. But believing in Jesus means seeing with eyes of faith, trusting his healing grace which sets us free to confess him as Lord over all the threats of fear and death.”* In other words: Believing is seeing.

But how can one born blind receive grace? This is the question that not only the religious leaders are wrestling with; Jesus’ own disciples themselves are blind to the very need of the man born blind: all they can see is his sin. Not only do they assume that his blindness is the direct result of a sin that either he or his parents had done; they are blind to the possibility of grace. Hoy says that while we ourselves generally don’t make that strong a connection between sickness and sin; we too, like these disciples, often make critical judgments about other people’s struggles in life. Our objections, say many a biblical scholar, have far less to do with the sin of others, and much more to do with our own blindness and sin toward others. Whereas we can readily see God’s amazing grace be extended to us; its far more difficult seeing grace extended to people who we deem unworthy. This blindness of ours, says Hoy, *“is our Lenten confession.”* A confession that we are blind to the multitude of sins from what we do or from what we have left undone. Hoy says, that like the man born blind, *“We can only confess that we are blind sinners in need of God’s gracious mercy and sight.”*

The miracle in our biblical passage for this morning, says Hoy, is that “Jesus sees this moment of encounter with a person in blindness not as an occasion for judgment, but as an occasion for shining God’s amazing grace upon those in darkness.” Did you notice that the blind man in our story did not even ask for this grace that Jesus gives? He simply becomes the recipient of that grace.

I can’t help but think of the story that is told by the Reverend Doctor Barry Bailey in his book [Being Like Your God](#). After the renowned rock guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughn was killed in a helicopter crash in the summer of 1990, his family requested that "Amazing Grace" be sung at his funeral service. Reflecting Vaughn's standing in the music community, Bonnie Raitt, Stevie Wonder, and Jackson Browne were honored to lead those gathered in singing the hymn. The crowd knew the words to at least the first verse, but stopped singing, and heard that trio's a cappella concluding rendition of "Amazing Grace."

Bailey, who was the officiant of the funeral service, commented on the power of watching and listening to this performance his book. He said he was especially touched by the poignancy of Stevie Wonder's singing 'I once was blind but now I see.' *"The hymn rang true even for the blind performer,"* Bailey insisted, *"because the song speaks of the universal blindness of our hearts and our spirits, not our individual eyes. Amazing grace,"* concludes Bailey, *"means we can never receive grace by the right belief or by our own goodness - it is amazing because it is free and undeserved and available to all."*

The blind man's journey to an even deeper faith is only half over. He's put on trial. When asked for details on how the healing took place the man confirms what he had already had said on public record. But the authorities seem no longer concerned with his having sight as they are with Jesus' part in the healing itself. No longer is he on trial as much as Jesus is on trial. In their eyes Jesus becomes the sinner for healing on the sabbath. Hoy says of the man's testimony; *"It bring division on the house. This division is not a result of the act of this man or his healing. What they are divided about now is whether or not Jesus the Christ is an agent of God's grace and healing. Their division,"* says Hoy, *"is about the very gospel itself!"*

The trial now turns to the parents of the man. They ask him, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

The parents do not even have the faith or courage of their son to face this time of trial. Nor do they affirm their son's testimony. Instead, they say, "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."

Hoy informs us that the parents lived in the fear that anyone who confessed Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, would not only be put out of the synagogue; but they would lose their standing in society itself.

One would think life would have been easier if this man had remained blind; but the scandal his healing created makes the man even bolder in his faith. Instead of putting distance between himself and Jesus the blind man insists that because of Jesus he now sees. Hoy says the blind man's predicament is ours as well: *"when Jesus associates with scandals like us,"* says Hoy, *"he takes that scandal of our sins upon himself as his very own."*

In September 1990 journalist Bill Moyers' hosted an eighty-minute PBS special focusing on what he called "the amazing qualities" of the lyrics from the hymn Amazing Grace. Moyers himself was stunned at the power this hymn had wielded in the lives of people from all walks of life. After interviewing legends such as country-singer Johnny Cash and opera-singer Jessye Norman as well as countless other recording stars who have sung the hymn it became clear by Moyers' interviews that grace does not always come yoked to good times or happy circumstances; it can also come as suffering grace, difficult grace, painful grace, costly grace, illogical grace. Yet despite its various guises, concludes Moyers, *"grace is always sufficient grace."*

Through the taxing trials with the religious leaders; and even in spite of his own parents turning their back on him; this man born blind came to know that the amazing grace of God through Jesus Christ is always sufficient grace. The Apostle Paul himself, who wrestled with a thorn in his side came to the same conclusion. In 1 Corinthians 12:9-10 he makes this epic confession of faith: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

Lent is not only a time for us to confess the truth of our blindness and fear, how it has limited us to be agents of grace and mercy to so many; it is also a time for us to confess the grace that we have indeed received in Jesus the Christ to overcome our fear, and to face any and all obstacles. So, with the healed blind man of this story, we, too, proclaim, *"I was blind, but now I see!"*