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Manchester United Methodist Church  
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"Blind, But Now I See"  
I Samuel 16: 1-13, John 9: 1-41

Our gospel lesson for today is long and complicated so instead of reading all of it at once, I am going to read it in small sections and reflect on each one as we go along.

So let's take a look at the first section of the story:

"As he walked along," meaning Jesus and Jesus is in Jerusalem at this time, "As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. Jesus said, 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 upon 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."

And thus the first act of this unfolding story. Jesus spots this man who is a beggar, born blind, can't work, survives only by this begging and Jesus understands his need and he does this very strange thing. He puts mud in his eyes and he sends him to one of the pools there in Jerusalem. Jerusalem in the first century had a number of public pools. They weren't swimming pools. They were places where people could drink or animals could drink and sometimes they were part of various religious festivals. Jesus put mud in this man's eyes and sent him to the pool and the name of the pool itself was "Sent". Interesting, he was sent to Sent and told to wash the mud out of his eyes and he came back seeing. By this time Jesus has disappeared. He disappears from the story for a long time.

The formerly blind man's neighbors and other people that knew him begin to dispute, "Was this really the guy that was blind? He now sees." And they go back and forth a bit and then the man says, "Yes, it's me." "Well, who did it?" "Well, Jesus did it." "Well, where is he now?" "Well, I don't know." And thus we have the man who is now able to see with his eyes, but cannot see with his heart. He sees with his eyes now, but he does not know or understand or fully appreciate the healer, the one who had sent him.

Now that's not so different from you and me, for we are all people who have been sent by Jesus. In fact, we have all been sent to this house of worship today by Christ, but we also know somehow in our hearts that Jesus also sends us into the world for the needs of the people like the blind man—the hungry, the sick, the lame, the lost and the lonely. We, too, like him, are sent, but like him, we often don't exactly understand who it is that sends us. Like him, we are people with mud in our eyes. Life is messy, isn't it? Our family lives, our work lives, the whole world is a messy place and Jesus invites us to clean the mess of life out of our eyes and go, to be sent and sometimes we really wonder who he is that is sending us. We're not so different from the man in the story.

Let's go back to the story and see what happens next.

"They brought to the Pharisees, the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was the

Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes and the Pharisees also began to ask him how he received his sight and he said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes and then I washed and now I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God because 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 who were opened.' He said, 'He was a prophet.'

It's getting lighter, you see. This person who now sees with his eyes is confronted by a very hostile interrogation about what happened. For you see, this healing of the physical sight occurred on the Sabbath Day and the religious leaders were the Sabbath police. They were intent upon making sure that everybody followed all the details what they believed to be the law of God. These Sabbath police had a problem because, on the one hand whoever healed the sight of someone born blind must be a good person, but a good person wouldn't have done that on Sabbath, a day when you didn't work. So this dispute arose among the religious "big shots" about whether or not this healing was a good thing or a bad thing.

With a delicious kind of irony, the great religious authorities end up turning to the beggar and they ask him to explain to them what had happened. This man who earlier had only been able to say that Jesus was the one who sent him, now, when pressed, reaches for a fuller understanding and explanation. He says, "Well, he's a prophet."

A prophet is someone who lives by words, by a message. A prophet is a person with a message and you know for many of us that's who Jesus is. He's not only one who sends us to care for those in need, but he is the one with a great moral and ethical message. A message about caring for those in need, but the larger message of loving our neighbor and our enemy. An idealistic, sometimes we might think unrealistic, but grand high moral ethical teaching. He's a prophet.

For a lot of us, a lot of the time, that's the most light we can shed on the question "Who is Jesus?" But John's story is not over and there are more adventures yet for the man formerly born blind. Let's listen to the next act of the story.

"The religious leaders, a second time called the man who had been blind and they said "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."

The man who has received his physical sight has gradually elevated his view of Jesus. He began with saying that Jesus was the one who sent him to the pool. And then he said, "He's a prophet, he's the one with a message." But now you see in this section, this act of the drama, the man who was formerly blind elevates his understanding of Jesus another notch higher, another rung higher on the ladder and he says not only is the teacher a prophet, but he's a prophet sent from God. You see how that raises the stakes? It's one thing to say Jesus is the person who sends you in mission, it's another thing to say that Jesus is a moral philosopher, a teacher. But now these teachings—love your neighbor, love your enemy—now these teachings which I said a moment ago may seem idealistic, but unrealistic, now these teachings have become not just the idealism of a great moral philosopher, but

they have become the message sent from God. You see how that raises the stakes? We can dismiss the rantings of a dreamer, even as beautiful, as idealistic as they might be, but if we move beyond the sense that Jesus is the moral teacher of idealism and begin to say that his message comes from God, then that message cannot so easily be discarded as naive idealism. Then that message becomes not just the message of a dreamer, it becomes the command, the message of the creator of the universe.

How do we say of God that God is naive and idealistic? Do you see how the stakes get raised here? The message is not just the message of the man Jesus. The message is sent from God and I wonder how uncomfortable it begins to make us. It makes me uncomfortable. Doesn't it make you uncomfortable? I don't always want to live the way Jesus taught us to live. I much prefer to see Jesus as this great idealistic teacher who, of course, doesn't really understand living in the messy, real world. But if it's God's message, then I can't so easily set it aside. If it's God's message, then I can't so easily say "Well, loving the enemy is idealistic, but this is the real world." The blind man is beginning to see ever more clearly who he is dealing with. The man with the message has God's message.

Well, let's look at the final act of the story. Jesus reappears, you know he appears at the beginning and puts the mud in the man's eyes and sends him off and then he's disappeared except to be talked about up until now, but now he reappears.

"Jesus heard that they had driven him out 'meaning the religious authorities had driven out the formerly blind man from the temple' 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.'"

First, he's the one who sends us. Then he's the moral, ethical teacher. And then in Act 3, he becomes the one with God's message. Now in the final act, the man formerly blind in his eyes and blind in his heart, now comes to the spiritual insight that says Jesus is not only the person with God's message, but in the punch line of this section, it says "And he worshiped him."

Back at Christmas time when we talked about the birth of the new baby, what was the title attributed to him? He was what? "Emanuel, God with us." Not just a man, not just a prophet, not just a person who has insight into God's ways and purposes, but Jesus is God with us. And the blind man, the formerly blind man, he worshiped Jesus. You don't worship a messenger, even a messenger that has God's message, you worship God. And John in his gospel has done for us a kind of a staged enlightenment where the one who formerly couldn't see with his eyes or his heart, now sees in crystal clarity the light of the world.

In the season of Lent we all travel journeys. Here in this story when Jesus came back a second time to speak to the man who was formerly blind, the man got the whole picture, the whole truth. And you know Jesus continues to come back at us and come back with us and come back for us and come back behind us and each time we learn a little more about just who he is. Yes, the one who sends us. Yes, the one who teaches us. Yes, even the one who teaches us God's message, but even more than that God with us. According to St. John you don't really get it until you realize that when we see Jesus living, healing, feeding, comforting, dying and rising, only then do we truly see and truly see God.

Amazing story and we're all on that pathway and I would just ask you this day, "Who is Jesus for you?"

Which step on the ladder are you today? By God's grace in Jesus Christ, keep coming until we too can see."