

# Was Blind but Now I See

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1<sup>st</sup> UMC Sunnyvale CA, P. D. Schlager

John 9:1-41

**I've got a friend, a pastor,**

**who told me that he had just had a very difficult experience at his church.**

**The furnace at the parsonage had malfunctioned.**

**Someone came to check it out. The furnace got a clean bill of health,  
but it was not in good order, as things turned out.**

**One Saturday in January, my friend said that he awoke early  
and tried to get out of bed.**

**But he couldn't get fully awake.**

**He thought he was simply tired from the night before,  
so he went back to sleep.**

**He awoke later and, in a stupor, looked at the alarm clock. It was almost noon!**

**He tried to get up out of bed. His head was throbbing, and he could not move.  
He couldn't get up, so he fell back in the bed.**

**At that moment he saw a small child, a little girl,**

***"How did you get in here?"***

**He heard himself ask.**

***"What is a child doing here in my house? "***

**The little girl gestured toward him, pointing him toward the door.**

**She said something to him like,**

***"You must get up and get out, or you will never get out."***

**He struggled out of bed at her urging,**

**crawled through the bedroom door and out of the house,  
collapsing on the front steps. The child was gone.**

**Heating experts were called. The house was full of carbon monoxide.**

**Now, as I said, my friend is a pastor, a theologian.**

**He is not given to flights of fancy. He told me,**

***"I think that 'child' in my room was some sort of angel.  
I think God sent her to warn me."***

I was skeptical, but I kept my skepticism to myself.

I told him to be careful to whom he told the story!

*"All I know is, a few minutes more, and I'd have been dead."*

I hear an echo there of the story that is today's gospel.

Jesus meets a man who has been blind from birth.

With some spit and dust, he heals him. Hallelujah!

*A man who was once blind, can now see.*

It is a marvelous story, rich and complex.

It's like a work of art, with symbols, metaphors, nuances and subtleties.

You can't appreciate all of it immediately.

You must live with it for a while,

*and then you will discover why it is called a masterpiece.*

Joyce Cary, who wrote *The Horse's Mouth*,

has a character in that book say of Matisse, the artist,

*"He peeled my eyes."*

The story of the healing of the blind man will do the same thing for you.

It is not only a story of *how Jesus opened a man's eyes*,

*it is there so Jesus can open your eyes.*

That is what John had in mind when he included this story in his gospel.

The Church was not interested in

collecting interesting data about Jesus' life.

They were interested in data

that *enabled Jesus to continue to speak to us.*

not in person now, .... (*he is gone from us now, )*

but in the *reading and the preaching of stories.*

That happens with this story.

It happens even with the shape of the story.

Jesus walks down a road, sees a man blind from birth.

He heals the man, and then goes away.

Which is what happened historically.

Jesus entered our world, ministered for a brief three years, and then left.

Those whom he touched are now alone.

Jesus is gone.

They are left to explain, to tell what happened to them.

So this story is about a man

*who has to explain what has happened to him.*

*They can't see Jesus. Jesus isn't there anymore.*

*All they can see is the man.*

*He has to explain what happened to him.*

First he is *harassed by his neighbors*

*who aren't sure that they like this changed person.*

They turn him over to the authorities who question him and *challenge his story.*

The authorities call in his parents.

They wash their hands of him, saying,

*"He's an adult, talk to him.*

*We don't have responsibility for him anymore."*

They bring the poor guy back again to the authorities for more interrogation.

This time they tell him

*that if it was Jesus who healed him,*

*they know that Jesus is a sinner.*

*Besides that, they now have evidence*

*that this healing took place on the Sabbath.*

*Therefore, the healing itself is in violation of the law.*

*"So 'Mister former blind man, what do you say to that?*

*What happened to you now? How do you plead?"*

He says,

*"All I know is that once I was blind, but now I see."*

The story ends with Jesus' returning,

*which is what we believe he will do.*

He will return, claim his kingdom, come in glory.

It concludes with a parting shot saying, to the Pharisees  
*"You are really the blind people in this world."*

It is an ingenious scenario conforming exactly to the situation  
in which the Christians found themselves  
in the first and second centuries.

They were touched by Jesus in some way.  
Their lives were changed by Jesus.  
They are no longer the same people.

But Jesus is no longer there. The world no longer sees Jesus.  
They see you.

According to this story you can expect to learn some things.

First, *your friends won't recognize you.*

You will be different.

You'll look the same, (as ugly as ever)

but you won't act the same.

*They don't know quite what it is that has come over you.*

*They can't quite put their finger on it,*

*but they know it is something.*

*Something must be wrong with you.*

Secondly, the authorities, those who have power in this world,  
will suspect something sinister has happened to you,  
because you don't conform anymore to their image  
of what a religious person should look like.

*So you must be lying*

*or else, possessed by demonic forces of some kind.*

So The religious leaders launch a thorough investigation,  
get a government research grant, conduct rigorous scientific studies.

The man said,

*" All I know is that this man put this stuff on my eyes, and I see.*

*I think he's a prophet."*

Though the man is standing right there in front of them,  
nobody believes it.

The man's parents are summoned. The authorities ask.

***"Is this your son?"***

The parents say,

***"Looks like our son, but we don't want to get into any big theological controversies. We have no idea how he got his sight back. Ask him."***

They call the man back in and say,

***"This Jesus doesn't have a medical degree, is not on the roll of the AMA. He is a sinner, now admit that he is a sinner."***

The now surely bewildered blind man says,

***"I don't know all that much about sin, salvation, sanctification, and all that big religious stuff,***

***All I know is a few days ago I was blind, and now I can see."***

The interrogators start over.

***Tell us one more time, from the start, how did he heal you?***

He said.

***"Do I have to go over all this again?"***

***"I have never even seen flowers growing.***

***If you are so interested in explaining all this, why don't you go ask Jesus yourself?***

***Maybe you want to be one of his disciples."***

This sends the religious authorities into a frenzy. They accuse the man of ***insulting the orthodox faith and throw him out of the synagogue.***

On his way out, somebody heard the man mumbling to himself,

***"I didn't even want to get into a theological discussion.***

***All I know is that once I was blind and now I see."***

So the first lesson from the story to John's audience, and to us, is ***don't believe those preachers who say***

***if you become a Christian,***

***that your life will all of a sudden be a wonderful success, and you will have no more sorrow, worry, or pain.***

***The fact is, it may get worse.***

Oscar Romero was born in El Salvador in 1917, one of seven children.

He was very studious. In fact, he entered seminary at the age of thirteen.

He stopped to work in the gold mines

in order to pay medical bills for his mother.

Later he would become an ordained priest and eventually editor of a very powerful newspaper.

In those days, Oscar Romero was very conservative, both politically and theologically very much against liberation theology.

In 1977 he was chosen as Archbishop and many felt **he was a "safe man" for the position.**

But something happened to Oscar Romero.

**He did not ask for the blessing: He did not seek it, it came to him.**

Within a few weeks after his ordination as Archbishop, **he began to see the real world.**

He began to see how people were treated.

He saw thousands of his own people from El Salvador who had been assassinated or kidnapped.

Men, women, children of all ages, all faiths,

**from the far left to the far right, bombed, blasted, raped, maimed, fleeing and frightened, hiding and hungry.**

He began to see farmers

**who pleaded to keep their land.**

He saw people **who wanted peace and land at the same time**

**he saw over two thousand peasants uprooted.**

In one year he saw 1,740 civilians killed,

bringing that total to over 50,000 since 1929,

and over 600,000 persons displaced during the same period of time.

With new insight, he began to be outspoken.

**He became the voice of hope for Central America.**

**He was no longer blinded to a suffering people.**

On Sunday, March 24th, while visiting a family in the hospital,  
the Archbishop delivered what would be his last speech.

He pleaded:

**"You kill your own people.**

**No one can force you to take the lives of people ...  
all of us can do something."**

At five o'clock on that Sunday afternoon, while serving mass  
**Oscar Romero was shot down.**

He never asked to be chosen an Archbishop.

He did not ask to have his sight restored so that he could see  
what was happening to his people.

But he received God's blessing anyway,

**and pleaded with his own people: "All of us can do something."**

If you go out into this world transformed by Jesus, a new person,

with your eyes open now, seeing things in this world  
that you hadn't even noticed before,

not everybody will think that is a good thing.

Some may even want to make it hard for you.

That is the first lesson communicated by this story.

**Your life isn't necessarily going to get easier  
when you become a Christian.**

But there is a more powerful lesson in this story.

It is **the definition of a Christian.**

That is really what this story is all about. It says

**a Christian is a person who once was blind, but now can see:**

**Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!**

**I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.**

The Gospel of John uses darkness

**as a metaphor for the human condition.**

He begins his gospel by announcing the birth of Jesus in this way:

*"The light has come into the darkness of this world,  
and the darkness has not been able to overcome it."*

It is in John's gospel that Jesus says in several places, including this text,  
*"I am the light of the world."*

In John's gospel, and the other gospels,  
*Jesus heals people who cannot see.*

It happens so often that there *must be something more here  
than just reporting a miracle.*

This is what it means.

*To be Christian is to have your eyes opened.*

Look more closely to what happened to the man.

John loves to use symbols,  
and there are wonderful symbols in this story.

Jesus takes a handful of dirt, he spits on it, and he makes clay.

The last time that happened in the Bible  
was in the Book of Genesis, when God created human beings.

So what we are witnessing here

is a "new" creation, a salvation, ... a person being reborn.

And look at this.

He places the mud on the man's eyes,  
then sends him to the pool at Siloam.

He tells him,

*"Go, wash in the water."*

Everyone in the Church listening to this story

in the first or second century, would think immediately, *baptism!*

It is like he is baptized. Listen to John's description,

*"He went and washed, he came back and he could see."*

If you are baptized, if you are Christian,

*it ought to make a difference in your life.*

The story says that the *first difference it makes in your life is,*



*you don't see the world the way you saw it before.*

*"Amazing grace! ... I once was blind, but now I see."*

Though her surgery was terribly painful, disfiguring, and difficult,  
she made it through.

*She found a whole new life for herself,*

*and new dignity and sense of mission.*

*Her recovery was rather miraculous.*

In fact, that's what she called it, a *miracle*.

She said.

*"God gave me the hope and the strength I needed to go on,"*

I was there when she said that to two friends,

*"God gave me the hope and the strength to go on."*

One friend said,

*"You have always been a strong person."*

The other said,

*"I don't know anyone who has a stronger sense of self than you."*

Isn't it curious how the confession,

*"God miraculously gave me the hope and strength to go on,"*  
is regarded as a threat?

It is of the nature of miracle to be an intrusion,

a dislocation of the expected and the explained.

Rather than say,

*"Wow, that's interesting!"*

in the face of miraculous claims we are conditioned to say,

*"Let's get all the experts together and explain what happened  
using the conventional, socially acceptable  
modes of explanation, okay?"*

You will learn, sometimes our discussions about "the stuff,"

our debates, methods of research, procedures for verification,  
*can be a means of avoiding the stuff.*

*Here was a man who was once blind. Now he can see,*

*and nobody takes time to wonder, to give thanks, to celebrate with him.*  
The whole thing is turned into an intellectual problem.

*Let's all get together and explain this in such a way  
that we reassure ourselves that nothing new,  
nothing that doesn't fit our reassuring modes  
of explanation has occurred here.*

Because if something truly new had happened,  
*and if it had happened by the hand of Jesus,  
then we might have to go back to the drawing board  
and rethink of few of our cherished assumptions like  
"if you are sick, you must have sinned,"  
or "there is nothing new under the sun*

During these weeks in Lent  
we have been working our way through the Gospel of John.

We find ourselves repeatedly going back to the story of Nicodemus,  
and that phrase, *"The Spirit blows where it wills,  
and you hear the sound of it,  
but you do not know where it comes from,  
nor do you know where it is going;  
so it is with everyone born of the Spirit."*

"So you have been converted to Christ?"

*"Yes."*

"Then you must know a great deal about Him.

Tell me, what country was he born in?"

*"I don't know"*

"What was his age when he died?"

*"I don't know"*

"How many sermons did he preach?"

*"I don't know"*

"You certainly know very little for a man who claims to be converted to Christ."

*"You are right. I am ashamed at how little I know about him."*

*But this much I know:*

*Three years ago, I was a drunkard. I was in debt.  
My family was falling to pieces; they dreaded the sight of me.  
But now I have given up drink. We are out of debt.  
Ours is a happy home.  
My children eagerly await my return home each evening.  
All this Christ has done for me.  
This much I know of Christ!*

(Michael Yaconelli, *Messy Spirituality: God's Annoying Love for Imperfect People*, [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002], p. 49.)

They can't explain it. it just happened. It is like,  
**"Once they were blind, but now they see."**

May God give you the grace to see  
**that you don't have to settle for your life being the way it is  
that we don't have to settle for the world being the way it is**

May God give you the grace to see Christ for who he is and to say  
**I once was blind but now I see.**

And may you see your neighbors and the world  
**with the eyes of Christ.**

Amen.  
SDG