

One Thing is Certain

John 9:1-41

Rev. Henry Pascual

Prayer: God of Light, open our eyes as your Word is proclaimed. Help us to see Jesus clearly, that we may encounter the Truth that sets us free. Amen.

You know, we all like to think of ourselves as objective people. We like to think that if we saw a miracle with our own two eyes, that would be it—we'd just believe. Case closed, right?

But our Gospel reading today tells a very different story. It shows us that sometimes, when the truth doesn't fit into the "boxes" we've built for God, we would actually rather discard the person than dismantle our boxes.

Today, we're looking at a man who started his morning in physical darkness and ended his day with a vision clearer than anyone else. **It's a story of hope.** It's the hope that Jesus heals, that Jesus dispels lies, and—maybe most importantly—that Jesus doesn't abandon us when we don't fit into the boxes others have built for us.

Now, because the story of the man born blind is quite long—42 verses in total—and we only heard a portion of it today, I want to help fill in some of the gaps as we go.

The story actually begins with a "why." The disciples see this man, blind from birth, and they immediately reach for that old playbook of shame and blame. They ask, "*Who sinned, this man or his parents?*"

That's a question that has been haunting us for a very long time. It's the ancient assumption that suffering *must* be a punishment—that if something is wrong in your life, it's because you, or maybe your family, did something wrong.

We're all familiar with that phrase: "the sins of the fathers." We see it throughout history and literature. In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (Act 3, Scene 5), for instance, there's a scene in a garden where a character named Lancelot Gobbo is teasing a young woman named Jessica, who is the daughter of the Jewish moneylender, Shylock. He tells her she's "dammed" because of his father's history—judging her not for who she is, but for the "box" of her heritage and the prejudices of the day.

He tells her she can't escape her past. She is stuck in a box built by a world that refuses to see her as an individual.

According to Bible scholar Gail R. O'Day, the idea that a parent's sins are visited on the children was actually a standard way in Jewish thought to explain why people suffer¹ (cf. Exo. 34:7, Num. 14:7, Deut. 5:9). This mindset actually goes all the way back to the very beginning of their law. If you look at the *Ten Commandments*, specifically the warning against bowing down to idols, it says:

For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me (Exod. 20:5).

But Jesus rejects that explanation.

He dispels the long-held myth that suffering is always a result of sin. Rather than treating the man's blindness as a theological puzzle to be solved, he sees it as a condition filled with meaning and purpose. He says: "*Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him*" (v. 3).

Then, Jesus does something remarkable. He spits on the ground, makes some mud, spreads it on the man's eyes, sends him off to the Pool of Siloam to wash, and then the miracle happens—**his eyes are opened**, and he comes home seeing.

But here's what is sad: once the man is healed, the religious leaders and his neighbors don't throw a party. There's no celebration. Instead, the community seems to catch what we might call a "Pox of Belonging." This is a contagious condition where a group values its own **boundaries—its "boxes"**—more than the **well-being of the individuals within it**.

So, they start interrogating him. But they're annoyed because his healing is "illegal" according to their Sabbath rules. They'd rather he still be blind and "belong" in his place than be healed and "belong" to Jesus.

When the religious leaders—the Pharisees—realize they can't break the man himself, they go after his family. This part is just heartbreaking. His

¹ Gail R. O'Day, "The Gospel of John," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, Vol. IX (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 653.

parents are caught between the miracle of their son's sight and the fear of being kicked out of their community.

So they tread carefully. They distance themselves. They say, "He's of age, ask him."

It is a lonely thing when the people **who should be standing behind you are too afraid to stand beside you**. We've seen this in the headlines recently—the painful silence of leaders in the Epstein case. How do you stay silent about the abuse of young girls, many of them minors? When the "box" of political loyalty or social status becomes more important than the person being harmed, the "Pox of Belonging" has won.

Thankfully, that's not the whole story. Just as the blind man eventually found his voice, there are women today in law, in politics, and in advocacy groups who are refusing to stay mum. They are stepping out of the boxes of "decorum" to fight for justice and hold enablers accountable.

In our story, the Pharisees call the man back for a second round. They don't even ask questions this time; they demand a confession: "*Give glory to God! We know this man Jesus is a sinner!*" They were outraged that Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath when no work was allowed. To them, the math is simple: **healing is work, work is a sin; therefore, Jesus is a sinner**.

But the man doesn't argue **theology**; he simply points to his experience, sticking to his reality. "I don't know if he's a sinner. **All I know is that I was blind, and now I see**" (v. 25).

There is a quiet, almost sly power in that kind of honesty. When you refuse to let labels overwrite your experience with God, you become dangerous. You become a **threat to a rigid system**.

The Pharisees eventually resort to mockery, simply because they've run out of arguments. They tell him, "You were born and brought up in sin—and you think *you* can teach us?" And then, they throw him out. They literally cast him out of the community because they cannot handle a reality that they didn't *authorize*.

But wait a minute—since when does reality have to be "authorized"? Since when does the truth need a stamp of approval from the experts? We've

seen this struggle in our own society. We live in an era where “truth” is often treated as a preference—something we can bend or ignore if it doesn't suit our side. But as the man born blind discovered, **reality isn't something we get to invent.** You may ignore it. You may suppress it. You may throw out the person who experienced it—but the **truth remains the truth. Reality is reality.**

As the story moves along, a fascinating “war of words” breaks out over one small, everyday word: **know.**

Have you ever noticed how, when we feel the walls closing in, we try to survive by clinging to what we think we *know*? In this story, the word “know” is used over and over again—but the Pharisees aren't using it to learn; they're using it as a **weapon.**

They say, “We **know** this man Jesus is a sinner.” They say, “We **know** God spoke to Moses.” They use their *knowledge* like a **shield** to suppress the truth. For them, *knowing* isn't about being open to God; it's about maintaining control.

In the end, because the man refuses to follow their script, they throw him out. They decide it's better to protect their rigid worldview by discarding the person who challenges it.

Don't miss how devastating this was. In that culture, being thrown out of the synagogue was “social death.” In a single afternoon, he lost his community and his status. He was finally able to **see the world**, but the world **refused to see him.**

And isn't that often how it works? Our pursuit of the truth can sometimes lead us into isolation. When you stop fitting into the “boxes” the world has built for you—when you start seeing things differently because of your experience with Jesus—the world might just decide to give up on you.

But that isolation is exactly where the deepest connection with Christ happens. Notice what comes next: Jesus hears he's been cast out, and **Jesus goes to find him.** When Jesus finds him, he confirms his faith. By the end of the story, the roles have flipped: The man who was “beggar and blind” is the one who truly sees, while the “leaders” are the ones left in the dark.

The hymn we sang earlier, *Amazing Grace*, is probably the most loved hymn in the world. We all know that famous line in the first verse: “*I once was blind, but now I see.*” That isn't just a poetic phrase; it's a direct echo of what the man says in verse 25 of our reading today.

But for the author of that hymn, John Newton, those words were deeply personal. You see, Newton spent years as a slave trader—literally participating in one of the most “blind” and cruel systems in human history.

When he finally became a Christian and joined the movement to abolish the slave trade, he realized that his old life wasn't just a mistake; it was a **form of spiritual blindness.**

And that brings us back to the end of our story. In a final, stinging twist, Jesus suggests that the people who *think* they see everything—the religious experts—are actually the ones who are blind.

The philosopher Dallas Willard once wrote: “**Reality is what you run into when you're wrong. In the collision, we always lose.**”² What he meant was that reality doesn't change just because we believe otherwise. In other words, when our assumptions collide with reality... **reality wins.**

That's what happens in this story. The religious leaders ran into reality. The healing of the blind man doesn't fit their theology. But instead of changing their minds to conform to the truth, to the reality of God's power, they try to deny what happened.

But the truth remains standing right in front of them. A man who used to be blind...now sees.

And that brings us to the hope in this story. Because the good news is this: **Jesus exposes lies. And Jesus does not abandon us when others push us aside.** When we speak the truth in love—with all the clarity we can muster—we aren't just winning an argument. We are counting on the Spirit of Truth to do something that lies far beyond our natural abilities.

So maybe the question for us today is simple. When we face confusion... when we face questions about faith...Can we hold onto what we know to

² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 346.

be true? Can we say, with honesty, **“I don’t know everything. But one thing is certain. God has been at work in my life. And because of that...I see the world differently now.”**

May it be so with us. Thanks be to God. Amen.