

Scripture Lesson: John 9:1-9, 13-22

Pew Bible N.T. pg. 96-97

¹ As he walked along, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must do the work of him who sent me while it is day; for night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷ saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). The man went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ His 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?” ⁹ Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone who resembles him.” He kept saying, “I am he!”... ¹³ So they brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.” ¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰ His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, ²¹ 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.” ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

Scripture Lesson: John 9:24-41

Pew Bible N.T. pg. 97

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “I do not know if he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ 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?” ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out. ³⁵ When Jesus heard that they had driven him out, he went and found him and said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ The man answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” ³⁸ The man said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. ³⁹ 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.” ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

John 9:1-41

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“Rule #13: Never, Ever Involve Lawyers”

Rev. Amy Terhune

My mom’s middle sister Margie is a lawyer. When we were growing up, we’d go to St. Louis, Missouri to see the family and my Dad and Aunt Margie would have this little competition. Margie told lawyer jokes, Dad told minister jokes, and we’d try to figure out who knew more jokes slamming their own profession. A few of the ones I remember my Aunt Margie telling go like this:

What's the difference between a vacuum cleaner and a lawyer on a motorcycle?

The vacuum cleaner has the dirt bag on the inside.

What do you call a kind, smiling person at a bar association convention?

The caterer.

What's the difference between a lawyer and a trampoline?

You take off your shoes before you jump on a trampoline.

And my Aunt’s personal favorite: What do you call a lawyer with an IQ below 80?

Your honor

My Aunt’s jokes were always nice and pithy. I’d tell you some of the minister jokes, but Dad’s jokes would usually go on and on and take forever to get to the punchline. But I digress...

All joking aside, lawyers are invaluable. I have known many a lawyer who have made sense out of what was baffling the rest of us. I have entrusted a lawyer with vital documents that, if I were to die tomorrow, would make the lives of my grieving husband and children infinitely easier. There are many times when lawyers are not only agents of justice, but also of repentance, reconciliation, healing, and fresh starts. And while our legal system is far from perfect, I remain committed to the ideals that unite us - that we are a nation governed by law, that we are innocent until proven otherwise, and that all are entitled to representation and a fair, timely trial before a jury of our peers. So despite Gibb’s admonition that we never, ever involve lawyers, sometimes a lawyer is truly what we need.

The Jewish people have also been held together across the centuries by a code of law – a covenant that shapes their identity and governs their way of relating to God and others in this life. And while the law at the time of Jesus perpetuated the inequalities and prejudices of that period in history, it is still regarded as one of the most humane and fair in the ancient world. By it, widows and orphans were cared for, foreigners were kept safe, and disputes could be resolved without bloodshed. What makes it tricky is that the Jewish faith was based in law, which means there was a fuzzy line between lawyer and theologian. In effect, religious leaders of Jesus’ day were both. Which is how it comes to pass that the disciples initiate this quasi-legal/theological conundrum. Who sinned – this man or his parents – to cause his blindness?

Aaargh! I’m so impressed that Jesus doesn’t just throttle them on the spot! These servants of Christ, his chosen band, have just seen this guy, probably sitting somewhere in the outer courtyard of the temple, begging for alms as faithful Jews come to and from the temple on the Sabbath day, and they effectively turn him into a theological specimen for study. Zero points for sensitivity, fellas. Thankfully, Jesus doesn’t deal in hypotheticals. He isn’t interested in studying theological specimens. Instead, his eyes hone in on a man on the margins—of the streets, of public space, of society. And in seeing, Jesus promotes him, from theological specimen to full-fledged human being, made in God’s image, a channel for God’s glory. And it’s not because God needs to prove his own greatness—that’s not what Jesus means when he says “he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him!” Rather, healing is God’s business. Truly seeing is God’s business. That’s what God does.

Friends, if you take nothing else away from today, take this: the divine eyes of Jesus Christ that saw that man on the margins, those eyes that glowed with compassion for him, those eyes that recognized his worth and his value and his humanity – those divine eyes look on you the same way: with love, compassion, and grace. You are not a theological specimen that God's studies in his spare time. God sees you with God's own heart – your worth, your humanity, your incredible potential, and your need. Loving you is God's business. That is what God does. That is who God is. You will never encounter life on this planet – in nature, in society, in the mirror – that God does not love.

So in typical fashion, Jesus rolls up his sleeves and goes to work. He thrusts himself into this man's experience. And mind you, this guy isn't calling out for healing. He may not even know who Jesus is. He's just sitting there, minding his own business, hoping for a few shekels, when some stranger walks up to him, spits on the ground, spreads mud on his eyes, commands him to go wash in the pool at Siloam, and then disappears for the next 28 verses.

To the man's credit, he follows Jesus' instructions. Even though he wasn't looking for healing that day, he goes and he washes, and he comes back able to see. Which should lead to rejoicing all around, and the end of the story. Instead, the lawyers get involved. Which begs an obvious question: why? John sort of slips the answer in there. Jesus performs this healing on the Sabbath, which we tend to blow off as insignificant. But in defense of the lawyers, consider that honoring the Sabbath is the one Commandment the Jews observe that attracts notice in the world around them. The ancient Romans didn't notice if there were idols or not. They couldn't go into the inner courts of the temple. They don't know what it means to take the Lords' name in vain. Not murdering, coveting, stealing, etc – that was law in Rome, too. But honor the Sabbath Day and keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, but on the seventh, you shall rest. You shall not go into the field, or open your shops, or work your trade, or cook your food, or clean your house. Not you, not your kids, not your servants, nobody. That kind of thing is culturally noticeable. Keeping the Sabbath is how you keep your identity – how you hold your people together when your homeland is under the foot of a ruthless empire like Rome. And they guard it vigorously because it's the glue, it's the unifier, it's what keeps them from merely being assimilated and subsumed in another culture. It's an act of resistance.

And what's more, the evidence suggests that Jesus agreed. He tended to follow the customs of his people. He prayed. He studied. He rested. He worshiped. The bone of contention isn't whether or not one should honor the Sabbath. Remember, Jesus comes as the embodiment of God's covenant. He doesn't want to eradicate it, he puts flesh on it. So the bone of contention isn't the significance of the Sabbath. The issue is the healing. The Pharisees designate healing as work, and therefore, a violation of the Sabbath. Jesus declares healing to be an act of worship through which God's glory is revealed, and therefore, a way of honoring the Sabbath.

Sadly, some of those lawyers just never get it. They label Jesus a sinner, giving evidence in the violation of Sabbath law that Jesus is moving away from God. In fact, the opposite is true. There's an interesting thing happening here. As our blind man regains his sight, he also begins to gain vision and insight. We watch his transformation unfold. In vs. 11, he reports that "the man called Jesus" healed him. By vs. 17, the man declares Jesus to be a prophet. And by vs. 33, our former blind man realizes "if this man were not from God, he could do nothing!" Meanwhile, the Pharisees become more and more short-sighted. And yet, the more they focus on the violation, the more the healed man insists on the validity of his experience. All I know is: I was blind and now I see. Ultimately, the man with sight assumes the role of teacher and evangelist: Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes! And they drive him out.

And that is where we meet Jesus again. Once more, Jesus thrusts himself into this man's experience, this time, to disclose his identity. Only then is the miracle complete. In a sense, the blind man, though miraculously healed, can get no further until revelation occurs. And when the man who now sees understands and accepts that Jesus is the Anointed One of God, he worships.

Step by step, he has come to understand that Jesus is not just a man, not just a prophet, not just sent from God. He is God. How does he know? Because through Jesus, he has personally encountered the glory of God revealed in his experience of healing.

Immediately on the heels of this lesson, Jesus gathers his followers around, perhaps including that man who now sees, and perhaps remember how they drove that poor man out of God's house, he says, "I am the Good Shepherd, who welcomes the sheep, who loves the sheep, who lays down his life for the sheep. Gibbs says never, ever involve lawyers. But not Jesus. Jesus opens his arms to anyone. Jesus involves every willing heart in the work of God. The question is: do we see who Jesus is? Do we see his love for us? Are we willing to see his call on our lives?"

Beloved, still today, Jesus chooses to thrust himself into my life and into your lives, too. He still wants to show us that asking who is a sinner and who is not is a futile question. We're all sinners. But we are all beloved, too. Jesus still wants to enlighten us, to heal us, to channel God's grace and glory through us. Jesus is still the embodiment of God's covenant, God's relationship with us. Jesus still wants us to encounter him in our daily life and to come to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he is the healer of all creation. Jesus is still the shepherd that holds us close, that loves us unconditionally, that gives himself to save us all...including the lawyers. Thanks be to God. Amen.