

March 2, 2008
Fourth Sunday in Lent

“Duh, Open Your Eyes!”

John 9:1-41

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed 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." Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

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 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. 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?" And 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, "Why, this is an amazing 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 if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do

nothing." They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."

Sermon

Have you ever had a "duh" moment? You know, one of those times when something should have been pretty obvious to you but your brain was misfiring or something and you couldn't grasp what was right in front of you. I had one of these on my vicarage in Tennessee about two years ago, before the present drought hit the Southeast. I was driving through Winchester, Tennessee and as I drove by the man-made lake I noticed the water level had dropped dramatically from the previous week. For the life of me I couldn't figure out how this was possible because we'd been having plenty of rain. Now understand the road I'm on runs directly on top of the dam that makes this lake. I am literally sitting on top of the dam they opened to lower the water level, and I can't figure it out. My vicarage pastor laughingly explained things to me later to my great embarrassment. I think he may have actually used the term, "Duh."

The Pharisees in our Gospel lesson from John seem to be having one of these moments. It all revolves around this quandary which is put in their face at verse 16, after their discovery of Christ's healing of the blind man. "*Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?'*" They are faced with an either/or situation. Either this Jesus is a sinner because he is doing things on the Sabbath day which ought not be done, like healing and making clay and anointing and such, or this Jesus is sent from God and thus is able to do these miracles and fulfill Holy Scripture from Isaiah "*In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.*"

This is a big problem for the Pharisees. Jesus has been preaching a new message and saying all sorts of wild things. He has been claiming to be from heaven, talking about people eating his flesh and drinking his blood, and even saying the he was before Moses. Most notable for the Pharisees is that Jesus claims that belief in him is the way to eternal life, not the strict observance of the law which the Pharisees hold so dear. Jesus being of sin or of God is a big deal to them.

The guy who was blind doesn't seem to have any problem figuring this one out. "*So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?'*" "(Duh) He said, "*He is a prophet.*"

The used-to-be-blind guy is on the right track here. He knows the miracle he received was from God. But the Pharisees simply don't want to believe it. They bring in the guys parents, hoping that they will undercut the miracle. And while they are indeed terrified of being thrown out of the synagogue, they can't contradict the fact that a miracle has been done. "*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 and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind?*"

How then does he now see?’ His parents answered, ‘We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.’”

Frustrated, they bring the formerly blind son back, probably hoping he’ll change his story. The Pharisees can’t get past the “duh.” They’ve decided Jesus upsets their world view, so no matter what, they won’t let him be from God. They tell the man *“Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.”* But he again states the obvious. *“Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”*

Duh. It’s obvious. Jesus is of God. The Pharisees refuse to see. They choose not to see. They choose to remain under the law. They want the do-it-yourself way to righteousness. *“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, ‘Why, this is an amazing 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 if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ They answered him, ‘You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?’ And they cast him out.”*

The man sees. The Pharisees don’t. Jesus later helps the man see even more clearly, to see that Jesus is more than a prophet, that he is the Son of Man, the Messiah. And the man responds in belief and worship and the Pharisees are confirmed in their blindness. *“Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.’ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, ‘Are we also blind?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, “We see,” your guilt remains.’”*

The Pharisees should have been able to see Jesus as Christ, the light of the world. They had the scriptures and they had the promise. It was a “duh,” put right in front of them. But they instead chose their laws and inherited traditions, their comfortable do-righteousness-yourself world view instead of Christ. And thus they were blind. Sinners, blind to the promise, are shown the promise in Christ and they believe His revelation and thus can see. That’s the lesson in a nutshell.

We see. We’ve been given the revelation and believe. We see Christ revealed on the cross and in the empty tomb. We see Him revealed in that we recognize we can’t get out from under our sin by our own power, and need to run to him for forgiveness. By the power of God’s Holy Spirit, we look at Christ as our savior and say, “Duh.” Of course He’s the way, the truth and the life. It’s obvious.

The world around us, however, keeps throwing quandaries at us that, like the Pharisees, make us choose between sight and blindness. There is the temptation to be like Pharisees, trying to follow the rules enough to be “good enough” to get to heaven. This is to turn a blind eye not only to your sin, but to the fact that only Christ’s righteousness, not yours, is the perfection needed for entrance into God’s kingdom.

Some say Christianity is too restrictive, too exclusive by Christ being the only way and throw up this Oprah-esque alternative that it doesn’t matter what you believe, just as long as you’re sincere about it. That’s blindness. That’s squeezing your eyes shut to the obviousness of almighty God and His plan of salvation through Christ and saying “I’m god. I get to determine how the universe and salvation works to fit my preferences.”

There is the blindness that just says, "Sin is fun. I don't want to think about the consequences. I'm just going to close my eyes and if it feels good, do it."

There are many, many ways and reasons we can come up with to choose blindness. The fact is that our very nature, our sinful nature, prefers to dwell in that darkness. But we have been invited to follow Christ. He's put Himself right in front of us and told us point blank, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" We were blind, but now we see. Christ has been made plain to us. His life, His death, His resurrection, His eminent return to gather us to Himself in paradise; all of this is right in front of us in His Word and Sacraments through the gift of His Holy Spirit in us. Our eyes are open to what He's done to save us.

Don't be blind. When you find yourself caught up in a sin, open your eyes and say, "Duh." The Way, the Truth and the Light is right in front of you. When you catch yourself stumbling around in the dark thinking you have to do it all yourself, see the light and say, "Duh," Christ has done it all for me. If you find yourself thinking you're in charge and have it all figured out, "Double-duh." You're not only blind, you're asleep. Wake up, open your eyes and look at the world and realize who is and always has been in charge. He's shown Himself to you. He's made Himself obvious to your heart and soul. See Him anew every day with the eyes of faith He's given you.