

Dunbarton Congregational Church
Sunday, March 2, 2008
10:30 a.m.

John 9:1-41
Blind Man's Bluff

John 9:1-41

⁹ As he walked along, he 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 work the works of him who sent me while it is day; 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). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸ 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?" ⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ 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." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³ 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. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 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 whether 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, and 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. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

³⁴They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” ³⁸He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

³⁹Jesus 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.” ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

We have a remarkably long text today, and a short amount of time in which to discuss it, so I thought I would simply tell the story in the rather humorous way it spoke to me this week as we lay buried under 8 more inches of new snow in what has been a singularly humorless winter. First, let me remind you that we are immersed in the great stories and characters of John’s gospel this Lenten season, which means that everything is about believing who Jesus is and not believing who Jesus is and the signs and miracles Jesus performs to *prove* to us who he is. Nicodemus comes in the dark of night wondering, the Samaritan woman comes at high noon wondering, and today we meet a blind man who doesn’t come at all, but is a demonstration project for those throughout time who have been wondering.

The pericope--which is a fancy name for a bunch of Bible verses that make up a story--is really a play in seven acts. It takes place in Jerusalem. Jesus has come with his disciples for the annual Feast of the Tabernacles.

Act I: The Spitty Mud

As he approaches the Temple, Jesus spies a blind beggar. There are probably lots of indigents to choose from since giving alms was a way to atone for sin and these beggar folks know where to plant themselves for optimal results. “Rabbi,” say the disciples, gazing down at the man, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Ancient Jewish tradition connected affliction with sin. It’s the whole theme of the Book of Job!

Yet Jesus has a different explanation: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind *so that God’s works might be revealed in him*. This is terrific. The man didn’t sin and his parents didn’t sin; God is just using the poor wreck of a guy to make a point. Doesn’t it feel that way in your lives sometimes?

Now let’s dim the stage lights. Focus the spotlight on Jesus and the blind man. With dramatic flair, Jesus spits on the ground and scoops up a fistful of dirt. Using his index finger, he stirs the mud in his palm and smears it on the blind man’s eyes. “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam,” he says. *Spitty mud*--as my British-influenced son would say, “*Lovely!*” The man staggers off, probably thinking to

himself, “What the heck! You bet I’m going to wash this blinking mud off my face.” But miracles of miracles, he comes back and is able to see!

Act II: The Identity Crisis

⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar begin to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some are saying, “It is he.” Others are saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He keeps saying, “I am the man.”

“No you’re not!”

“Yes I am.”

“Is he the man?”

It’s not him?

It can’t be him?

It *is* me.

No way.

Yes, way!

It is him.

It’s not him.

Is it me?

¹⁰They keep asking him, “If it is you, then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He answers, “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.” ¹²They say to him, “Where is he, this Jesus?” He says, “I don’t know.” So they bring him to the Pharisees so everyone can decide who he is.

Act III: The Incriminating Evidence

¹⁴Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened the blind man’s eyes. ¹⁵The Pharisees, being ever so clever, ask him how he received his sight. He says, “Jesus put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” “Ah-ha!” some of them cry, “This man is not from God; everyone knows there is no kneading of bread or making of mud pies allowed on the Sabbath!” But

they are divided; some actually wonder how a man who is supposed to be a sinner can perform such signs?”

¹⁷So they say again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, this Jesus, it was *your* eyes he opened?” The man says, “He is a prophet.” Since the man clearly doesn’t know who he is, the Pharisees call in his parents.

Act IV: The Wimpy Parents

“Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”

Cut to parents whispering. “What are we going to do, George? We can’t tell them about Jesus. They’ll throw us out of the synagogue. They’re not having any of this Messiah-talk.”

“But Mildred, this is our son who was blind and now can see.”

“Stuff it, George. Hasn’t he caused us enough grief? Anyway, what will the neighbors say?”

They address the officials: “Gentlemen, we know that this is our son, and that he was born blind. But we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Why don’t you ask him; he’s a big boy!”

I know. It’s pathetic, but we’ve all willfully dodged a few bullets in our day.

Act V: The Limb

The Pharisees now cry, “Give glory to God, for we know that this Jesus is a sinner!” The blind man steps out on the proverbial limb. “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I *do* know, that though I was blind, now I see.” The Pharisees rev up the chain saw. “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

“I’ve told you already, and you won’t listen!” Rrrrrr . . . rrrrrr . . . “Why do you want to hear it again? Perhaps *you* also want to become his disciples!”

²⁸Then they revile him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses . . . You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us? You are O-U-T out!”

Crack! The blind man tumbles out of the Tree of Pigheadedness.

Act VI: The Big News

³⁵Jesus hears that they have driven the man out. When he finds him he says, “Do you believe in the Son of Man, the one from the Book of Daniel who sits at the right hand of God, the one who comes from heaven, the one who is as close as one can get to God?” ³⁶The man blind is probably thinking, “Nice of you to come back *now*, Jesus.” But he says with humility, “Who is this man?” ³⁷Jesus says to him, “Surprise, surprise, surprise! The one speaking with you is he, I am him. I am me!” And this formerly blind man, who is really quite an amazing fellow isn’t he, says, “Lord, I believe.” And he worships Jesus.

Act VII: The Point

We take scripture so seriously, don’t we? We take church so seriously and money so seriously, and work so seriously, and our health so seriously, and parenting so seriously, and love so seriously and there is plenty to be serious about, but seriously, the one thing we don’t take seriously enough is our faith! I mean what is wrong with this blind man—has he no shame, just believing in Jesus like that? What self-respecting person walks around without doubts? What self-actualized, autonomous, fully-integrated, therapeutically-adjusted, well-educated Christian allows him- or herself to be merely a sign from God about who Jesus is, a heavenly spotlight pointing to the one who is the true light?

You see, my friends, a blind man found the power to call the world’s bluff. He knows what he knows, he was blind and now he sees, and that is enough amazing grace for him, which simply leaves me wondering, what exactly is amazing enough for us? Amen.