

March 15, 2026

John 9:1-41

Our Journey to Calvary:

“Opened Eyes!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The man was blind from birth. He had never seen a sunrise or a beautiful sunset. His eyes had never traced his mother's face or another human being. He had never seen the colors of the creation. On a Sabbath day he sat where he had always been sitting, gripped by a darkness that he had known for his whole life. This true story doesn't begin with the man seeing Jesus. It begins with Jesus seeing him. John narrates: "As he [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth (Jn. 9:1)." What exactly does Jesus see beyond simply a man born blind? And what is going to happen to this man now that Jesus has seen him?

The disciples are looking too, and they ask him: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" It's in those moments when we can't seem to make sense of why something has happened that we not only try to understand it, but we often say things out of confusion. How do we explain a man born blind? We often reach for cause and effect. Suffering must be punishment and pain in life must prove guilt so we think. In our own lives we often leap to these conclusions don't we? We think: "I know that this is happening to me because of what I've done." Maybe, but not every bad happening in life comes from a specific sin. It can be just the way things are in a fallen world.

Jesus sees things differently than his disciples: "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 ... As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." What we learn here is that tragedies and sufferings in this world, even from birth, can be so that God's mercy is revealed and not because the sufferer must be worse than others. God lets affliction stand that his great works might be done and known. To paraphrase Luther, "we should stop speculating about 'whose sin' it is and start looking for what God will do - absolving, helping, recreating, and drawing confession of Christ as the only Savior."

If only we might take that attitude. Instead of jumping to conclusions when bad things happen in our lives, Jesus invites us to remember that our help is found only in him our maker and redeemer. Indeed. Our maker is able to remake, and our redeemer is able to save that which is un-savable, even cleaning up what is filthy through and through. This is what we should be thinking about when the many bad things in life are happening to us. Jesus Christ is the light of the world and he works for as long as it is day. But soon night is coming when no one may work. These are the words of our Savior.

There is an urgency when he says that he must work while it is day as night is coming. For as long as Jesus is in the world, whether in the flesh or in the gospel and sacraments, he remains the light by which the blind may now see. The man born blind becomes a picture of what Jesus does and what he continues to do in the Gospel and sacraments in our day. It is not the mere improvement of what is old, but the creation of faith in Jesus that leads to a new and eternal creation. In Jesus there is all good that can be given and received. When Jesus sees this man born blind he sees him as one in need of restoration to be his own forever in heaven. He sees the same in us.

The first man was formed from the ground, and now Jesus spits on the ground, making mud with the saliva, and spreads the clay on his blind eyes. Kneading clay was among the thirty nine categories of

Sabbath work forbidden by the rabbis. But in this text the Creator of the universe, who came to his rest after six days of creating, is now pointing to his re-creating strength for a humanity returning to dust. The command to observe the Sabbath cannot forbid the forgiveness of sins and salvation. Therefore, the Lord Jesus, who long ago “formed the man of dust from the ground,” touches mud to now blind eyes. What this means for us is astounding. The action says to us: “See, the hand that formed humanity still works - still gives sight - and can make everything new.” Jesus says to the man born blind: “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which means Sent).” So he went and washed and came back seeing.

Jesus sends the man born blind to the place of Sent so that the way of water will return him to Jesus, the Sent One. With spit and earth, and with the simple word, “Go, wash,” Christ weds sign to promise, opening not only the man’s eyes but also his faith to confess him as Savior. He goes. He washes. He sees.

Yet before he beholds Jesus with seeing, believing eyes, he must pass through a gauntlet of opposition while confessing what he knows. Neighbors dispute, leaders interrogate, his own parents distance themselves, and the final judgment thunders: “You were born in utter sin.” He is cast out of the synagogue where the Savior is supposed to be found, but no one can stop Jesus from finding him.

So God deals with us. The road to Jesus runs from blindness through bewildering sights - mud on our eyes, the world’s contempt, even the chill of religious scorn - until the great sight of salvation stands before us. Cast out, we are found. Driven away, we are drawn near. And when our eyes are opened at last, the first face we truly see is the face of the One who was sent for us. This he does in his holy Word and sacraments. He grants us **Opened Eyes!**

Jesus finds the man born blind. He finds you and me in the means of grace. His question is direct: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The healed man answers: “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Then comes the Gospel’s thunder in the soft and tender words of Jesus: “You have seen him ... it is he who is speaking to you.” And so the eyes that were opened in the pool are now opened in the heart. “Lord, I believe!” and he worshiped him. The man born blind received Jesus as the Son of Man who is the Sent One who was destined to be lifted up on the cross as the gift of salvation - his salvation and ours.

This is the comfort for every sinner who comes into Christ’s presence with nothing but darkness in the eyes and emptiness in the heart. He does not wait for you to find him. He finds you. He sees you before you see him. He does not ask you to untangle your afflictions or trace every hardship to its cause. Instead, he calls you to the water of Baptism, where the mud of your sin is washed away and where sight is given that no human eye can produce. There he puts his name upon you and opens your eyes to behold him as the Savior who has borne your guilt, carried your sorrows, and entered your darkness to pull you into his marvelous light.

With opened eyes comes a new way of seeing the world. The man born blind could now trace every face and sunrise - but more than that, he could see Christ as his Savior. So it is for you. Life still brings trouble, but the trouble no longer defines you. Even your unexplained hardships become places where the works of God are displayed. For in Christ you are judged only by what he has done for you. The verdict

is spoken: “forgiven, restored, loved, made new.” Sight is not merely vision, but it is faith recognizing the Light of the world.

Meanwhile, some insist their eyesight needs no healing. Like the Pharisees, they believe they see clearly, yet remain blind where sight matters most. They are blind to their sin, their need, and the Savior before them. They reject the spit, the mud, and the water as the humble means by which Christ gives his gifts. So Jesus speaks the sobering truth: “That those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” Offended, they ask, “Are we also blind?” Jesus replies, “Now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.” Here is the dividing line in every soul: those who confess their blindness receive sight, and those who cling to imagined clarity remain in the dark.

Therefore, let us worship him as the healed man did. Let us confess our blindness that he may give us sight. Let us return again to his Word and to his Supper, where the Sent One gathers the cast-out. And with opened eyes of faith, let us behold the One lifted up for us, who died for us, and who even now shines as Light in our darkness. Dear brothers and sisters, the same Jesus who saw the man born blind sees you today. He sees you in mercy and in love. And he speaks to you as he spoke to him: “You have seen him and it is he who is speaking to you.” In that light we live. In that light we rise. And in that light we will see him face-to-face forever. That’s what it means to have **Opened Eyes!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott