

Weekly Edition – March 30, 2018
Gospel According to St. John – Third Year

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided.

¹⁷ Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened."

The man replied, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹ "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

²⁰ "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. ²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

²⁵ He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

²⁶ Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

²⁷ He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

³⁰ The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. ³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

³⁴ To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

The Gospel of St. John

Part I

- Prologue 1:1-14
- First Year 1:15 – 2:22
- Second Year 2:23 – 6:71
- Third Year 7:1 – 12:50

Part II

- The Last Discourse 13:1 – 17:26
- The Arrest and Trial 18:1 – 19:16
- Death and Resurrection 19:16 (b) – 21:25

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Entering Into Scripture: A Meditation on Three Interrogations

I am immediately drawn by all the excitement and commotion. Returning home I stumble upon this assembly in the street. I recognize some, but not others as I approach, eager to see what the fuss is all about. My friend, seeing that I am clearly not in the know, proceeds to explain the cause of all the excitement. My neighbor got his eyes back! Blind from birth, he now can see. Everyone is amazed and joyous. It is a miracle! I want to see him for myself, but the crowd is too thick.

"Where are you going?" I asked. "We are taking him to show him to the priests," I was told. "Why?" I replied. He explained that it was the One they call Jesus who had healed him. I didn't need more of an explanation. I was there yesterday, in the Temple, when Jesus was teaching. He was challenged by the Pharisees, who would have stoned Him to death if He didn't somehow manage to get away.

I had wanted to hear Jesus for myself. His reputation is known far and wide, but I had never heard Him myself. So, I feel remarkably fortunate to have been there yesterday to hear Him teach. Jesus said some things that rankled the Pharisees – things like He is the light of the world. That He is God's Son. That He knows Abraham and was from before him in time. Many in the crowd believed, but no one would say so for fear of the Pharisees.

As for me, I wanted to believe but I am a skeptic at heart. That is until now. Jesus must be God's Son – who else could give sight to a man born blind from birth? In all of Israel no one has ever heard of such thing!

I join in. We are taking the man to present him to Pharisees as living proof of the claims Jesus has made. No doubt this is a risky proposition – for all of Jerusalem knows the Pharisees hate Jesus. But this miracle is just too fabulous. This is big – the biggest thing to happen in my lifetime, and I want a front seat to see what

happens next. Surely the Priests will believe in Him now.

It was a short walk through the narrow streets of Jerusalem from the City of David district. The streets are packed with pilgrims from the surrounding countryside who have come up to Jerusalem for the Festival of Tabernacles. It ended yesterday, but because it is Sabaath, a day of rest, no one can return until morning. Our little caravan makes our way slowly, passing through the Valley Gate as we make our way toward the Eastern Wall of the Temple and the gate that is called Beautiful. Our entourage seems to be growing as we go, as word spreads about the miracle done today in our midst.

There was quite a crowd by the time we arrived in the Court of Israel and greeted the priests. Immediately one of the elders brought the formerly blind man forward and explained all that had happened. The priests listened intently.

One of the Pharisees came forward. I do not know him, but his vestments signal he is a man of rank. He looks at the man intently. His gaze is penetrating – one might even say intimidating. It is very unnerving. I look away. Time stands still. Interrogating the man, he demands, "How did you receive your sight?"

"He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

Immediately a division broke out among the Pharisees. They began quarreling with one another. A few said that this Jesus must be a prophet because who had ever heard of such a thing. But the majority reviled them, saying He cannot be a prophet because He does not keep the Sabbath. There were two Sabbath infractions – making of clay and the act of healing – both which were forbidden by Jewish law. The argument became more heated, neither side persuading the other.

Finally, the ranking priest turned back to the man. He resumes the interrogation. "What have you to say about Him? It was your eyes He

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opened." His words were filled with contempt for the man.

"He is a prophet," the man said.

Immediately the argument flared-up again. Some said Jesus must be a prophet. But others said He is a Sabbath-breaking sinner. And to this they add a new charge. A few claimed that the man was never really blind, and therefore was not really healed. They claim he made the whole thing up. I know that isn't true, but I dare not speak up. Many of the Pharisees were persuaded by this argument and believe the man to be a swindler.

The ranking Priest turned once more to the man. "Where are your parents? Are they living?" Before the man could reply, someone in the crowd answered, "They are alive, and I know where they live."

"Bring the parents to us," he demanded. At once the argument flares again. This is nothing new – the Pharisees enjoy arguing. It is sport for them. But there is something different here. The level of vitriol is unlike anything I have ever witnessed. The crowd keeps a low profile. No one dares to say a word for fear of being put out of the Temple.

It is a long wait for the parents. Those moments seem to stretch on. The air is filled with tension and contempt.

When they came into the courtyard, they were easy to pick out. She was trembling in fear at being summoned before the Priests. He was equal parts afraid and confused. Ushering them through the crowd they are brought to the ranking Priest.

He resumes his interrogation, now directed at the man's parents. "Is this your son?" he demanded. They acknowledge it is he. "Is this the one you say was born blind?" he asked in a ridiculing tone. They confirm it is as the Priest has stated. "Then how is it that now he can see?"

They were visibly shaken. Finally, after what feels like an eternity, they speak up. "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we

know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself."

Their words seem to land hard on the inquisitor. They are right. The man is of age. He can speak for himself. Besides, what more evidence does this Priest need? The man has testified for himself. His neighbors have testified on his behalf. And now the parents confirm that testimony. Why won't they accept it?

The ranking Priest calls for the man to come forward a second time. "Give glory to God!" he demands. It is the Jewish way of demanding the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. "We know this Man is a sinner," the Priest pressed.

The man calmly replies, "Whether He is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

Unsatisfied, they repeat their earlier line of questions, hoping to find some inconsistency in his testimony by which they might discredit him. "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?"

The man grows weary at this unwelcomed repetition. Now, seeming both a bit exasperated and with a growing boldness, the man answers them. "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become His disciples too?"

It was like he poked a sleeping lion. The whole assembly of Pharisees seemed to growl and hurl insults at the man. "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this Rascal, we don't even know where He comes from."

A hush fell over the assembly as the man spoke up again. "Now that is remarkable!" he says incredulously. "You don't know where He comes from, yet He opened my eyes." His head cocks to one side as if in disbelief of the way those before him are reacting. "We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does His will." Defiantly, he continues. "Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a

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man born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing."

"You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" At that the Temple guards grabbed the man and dragged him from the Temple. The Pharisees turn to leave in huff. The crowd falls silent. Everyone is filled with fear. I am shocked. What just happened? Isn't a blind man seeing a good thing?

The Priest and Pharisees move away. Then the crowd slowly begins to drift away. There is absolute silence. We are all stunned. No one says a word. I feel like I am suspended between belief and disbelief. The man's eyes were opened. Surely Jesus is the Promised One. Yet here are the religious leaders who refuse to accept Him. The joy I felt earlier today has left me. I feel empty. Empty and confused.

Reflection 4: Process of Discovery

The formerly blind man does not participate in the argument that ensued between the Pharisees. Yet he is there, listening to those arguments which run both ways – either You are a law-breaking sinner, or You are the Holy One of God. He listens to the religious leaders, and he begins to form his own view. With his neighbors he merely recounted the literal facts of what had happened. His initial reply to his interrogator suggest a movement from literal facts to interpreting those facts. But now he is ready to

render his own belief – You are a prophet. He will go even farther before the interrogation is over. He will hint that he has become Your disciple and even take the first elementary steps of inviting those Pharisees to become Your disciples too. The process of growing in faith is one of discovery. Each new circumstance presents the potential for a deeper response to Your love. This doesn't happen once for all, but little by little with each new day and every new circumstance in my life.

Application: What in my present circumstance is offering me a deeper response to God's love in my life?

Reflection 5: Coming of Age

I once heard it said that God has no grandchildren. The implication is that every one of us must come to claim You for ourselves. I don't get to borrow my faith from another; I must become Your child through my own confession of faith. Here we see the important but limited role of the parents. Their testimony is poignant – "yes, he is our son and yes, he was born blind. But now he is of age. He has entered adulthood and he must speak for himself. We can no longer speak for him." We are born spiritually blind, all of us. Receiving Your light and coming into the

maturity of adulthood are linked. Adulthood does not come from my parents, but from receiving Your light. Without Your light and life in me, my life exhibits the qualities of a toddler throwing a temper-tantrum – demanding my right to myself and insisting upon those things that I think will make me happy in the moment; no matter how harmful they may really be to me. We don't really come of age until we place our trust in You, no matter what our chronological age may be.

Application: What attitudes or behaviors in me betray that, spiritually-speaking, I might yet be very much a toddler?

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Reflection 6: Fear-driven Life

Despite the strong natural ties of the parent-child relationship, the parents all but throw their son under the bus. The text tells us why. They were afraid. They were fearful of being thrown out of the Temple, excommunicated from their community, removed from their identity as faithful Jews. They were more worried about what they stood to lose than what might happen to their son. They were unfamiliar with the light and could not explain what had so transformed

their son. When our lives are dominated by fear, we will act badly and bring harm to those around us. Its why You tell us so many times, "do not be afraid – just believe." The foil for fear is faith in You. Time and again You speak to our fear with the invitation to bring our worries to You and leave them with You. Only one thing can dominate the center of my life. If it is dominated by fear, it displaces You. If it is dominated by You, You displace fear.

Application: *Is there some element of unrecognized fear in me right now – some worry that has me unsettled or might be secretly steering my actions or shaping my conduct?*