



“I Know What I Know”

a sermon by

Rev. Katie Crowe

First Presbyterian Church
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There are a few stories in the gospel that just reek of our humanity and this is definitely one of them. In the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, this story is labeled “A Man Born Blind Receives Sight,” and, because it is a long passage, the next heading is “The Pharisees Investigate the Healing.” If I were the editor of this interpretation, I may have labeled it “People that Just Don’t Get it.” But, that’s just me. You can decide for yourself. Listen for the Word of God, coming to us from the 9th chapter of the gospel of John, selected verses.

“As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed 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.” 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, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 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?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” But they kept asking him, “then how were your eyes opened?” 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.” 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 mud and opened his eyes. 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.” 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.

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.” 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 we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him...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.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. 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?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are the 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, “Here is an astonishing 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 he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the son of

Man?..” Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now and found. Was blind but now I see. It’s a pretty great anthem for our faith. Simple. Straightforward. Beautiful. Harkening back to a simpler time perhaps in all of our faiths and lives. To that moment when all we knew was amazing grace. But the seeds of our own disillusionment with the simple proclamation of God’s saving goodness that this hymn so beautifully describes were planted long before this hymn was even thought of. Planted, perhaps, by the gospel writer in our text for today. By all accounts it was an act of amazing grace that the nameless man born blind received on that fateful day. When the disciples and Jesus were talking theology and the law and he was made an example of. ‘Who sinned first?’ They asked. And Jesus revealed God’s work of healing. Some spit and mud- a dip in the river- and the man’s life- heretofore spent most likely with all the other blind men (begging at the gates of the city) was transformed. Amazing grace how sweet the sound. I once was lost but now am found. Was blind but now I see. Of course, this got the neighbors talking. A little subtle social commentary is slipped in by John- they didn’t recognize him. “No, this isn’t him, just someone who looks like him.” Of course, his appearance didn’t change- he just got his vision back. But they didn’t believe he was who he said he was. They didn’t recognize him- and probably because, begging at the temple gate with all the other blind men, it wasn’t just *he* who wasn’t looking *them* in the eye.

And then begins the grand inquisition that becomes almost comic in its absurdity. Amazing grace quickly turns into an amazing headache for this man who has just experienced undoubtedly the most profound moment in his life. He is the recipient of this remarkable blessing but rather than kill the fatted calf in celebration, the people just can’t handle it. They can’t handle this guy who is eyewitness to a miracle (no pun intended) nor can they handle Jesus the healer, because too many questions are then raised. For one thing, if it was a man who did this, then he must be a sinner and sinners can’t heal people. For another, he broke the law because he healed on the Sabbath, and by the way, we don’t even know where he came from but that mud and spit thing has been used by sorcerers as ointment in the past, so you can’t tell us this guy came from God- Moses would never approve. “Then how were your eyes opened?” “Where is he?” “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” “Is this your son who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” “What did he do to you?” “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” Can you hear the anxiety rise? With each question- followed each time by a simple affirmation of truth? ‘I am the man,’ ‘I do not know where he is,’ ‘He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.’ ‘He is a prophet.’ ‘I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’ This poor guy just can’t get a break from the effects of this miracle on his life- from the fact that amazing grace may have brought back his sight but revealed the blindness of everyone else around him until he is at the point of total exasperation, blows up at the priests, and gets kicked out of the temple not only for disrespecting the upper crust but because he is now also considered a heretic because he had an experience of Jesus! Thanks, Jesus, but you might as well have left me at the city gates rather than do me this great favor of changing my life and then heading for the hills before the fallout hits the fan.

No wonder we ourselves are so hesitant to share our own experience of Jesus with others. When this is the reception we can expect or fear. Tell one little story about Jesus healing a part of your life, even if it is not nearly dramatic an experience as the healing in this text, and suddenly you are susceptible to a barrage of questions that are on everyone's mind. Vulnerable to the anger of those who can't handle that God would do something good in your life when there is so much evil in the world. Who question your motives and find you suspect just for showing up with the invisible evidence of God's grace upon you. Who don't like what you have to say when your testimony reveals that they perhaps haven't been seeing things or people so clearly lately. When your witness to a truth that you uniquely can speak to clashes with their world view or worse, their sensibilities. You may have experienced this before. Oh, you're a Christian? Then where was God when my loved one got sick? How powerful and good is God really when there are earthquakes that kill hundreds of thousands? How can you say that God spoke to you- what makes you so special? Where is Jesus now, I sure could use the help? The questions are familiar and they are good ones that need to be asked. 'You say you were healed by this Jesus? The Pharisees asked, So who is he? What was he doing? How exactly did it happen? Who do you think you are? And where the heck is he now?' It is easy to avoid the answer when we fear the questions.

We don't have all the answers about God and Jesus. And the good news is that we don't have to. You only have to know what Christ has done for you. To claim your corner of that amazing grace, and have courage enough to speak the simple truth of your experience of God in Christ Jesus. Amazing grace that saved a wretch like me. "All I know is that once I was blind, and now I see." That conflict will arise is unavoidable. But we are not to be blinded by fear just because we see things differently since Christ touched our lives and entered our hearts. For it is a vision that needs to be shared. The man born blind had his sight restored by Jesus and was then left alone to deal with the hard realities of witnessing to Christ in a hostile and threatened world. He was interrogated and harassed, doubted and denounced, thrown out of the temple, but instead of being abandoned by God, Christ sought him out. "Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus does not turn a blind eye to his struggles but seeks him out. He is not just left hanging with his one experience of Jesus to cling to, but found by the Lord for the sole purpose of strengthening and affirming him, for welcoming him as his disciple. Because it is hard to be a witness for Christ. It is hard to simply say 'all I know is that once I was blind but now I see' because the world isn't asking simple questions, and is not satisfied with simple answers. Answers like 'I know what I know.' Answers like amazing grace. But those are the answers that are ours to give. No more, and no less. For we were lost, but now are found. Christ is the light of the world. And we no longer need to walk in darkness. This is the good news of the gospel. Amen.