3—22-20, The Holy Way

Sermon on John 9:1—41

1. Introduction
2. This passage involves a number of scenes. We’ll take them one-by-one.
3. In the course of the passage, we’ll encounter John’s frequent use of light and darkness/blindness and sight images for good and evil.
4. The blind man’s wilderness
5. The Pharisees’ wilderness
6. Prayer
7. The text
8. (v. 1—5) **The problem** As he [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.
9. (v. 2) His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” [For the disciples, this blind man is apparently no more than a theological case study. They wonder if Jesus will agree with the rabbis who taught that a child was capable of sinning in the womb and thus subject to punishment. Or maybe Jesus will subscribe to the Old Testament idea that the consequences of the parents’ sins were visited on the children and grandchildren. Jesus isn’t interested in the discussion.]
10. (v. 3) Jesus answered, “neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.”
11. (v. 4 & 5) We [Jesus and those who follow him] must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. [Here Jesus appears to be referring to his time in the tomb] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” [Here are some examples of John using the metaphors of light and darkness.]
12. (v. 6 & 7) **The solution** When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva [Do you hear an echo here of the creation story, where man is formed from mud?] 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.
13. (v. 8—12) **The neighbors** 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?”
14. (v. 9a) Some were saying, “It is he.”
15. (v. 9b) Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.”
16. (v. 9c) He kept saying, “I am the man.”
17. (v. 10) But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?”
18. (v. 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.”
19. (v. 12) They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”
20. (v. 13—34) **The Pharisees**
21. (v. 13—17) They [the neighbors] brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. [The Pharisees sought to be the most devout inn following the Torah, and the neighbors apparently felt that they would be able to get to the bottom of this.]
22. (v. 14) Now it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. [This information changes everything. Jesus might have violated the Sabbath in various ways. Mixing the mud could be seen as kneading, a violation. Smearing the mud on the man’s eyes is another potential Sabbath violation. And it’s likely that the trip from where Jesus met the man to Siloam was farther than the number of steps allowed on the Sabbath. All this would concern the Pharisees.]
23. (v. 15a) Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight.
24. (v. 15b) He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.”
25. (v. 16a) Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.”
26. (v. 16b) but others [could one of these others be Nicodemus?] said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. [Do you notice that no one has said, “How wonderful for you that you have your vision! Praise God!”]
27. (v. 18—23) The Jews [remember that this refers to the Jewish religious leaders, including the Pharisees] 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
28. (v. 19) and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”
29. (v. 20 & 21) 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 he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age [13 or over] He will speak for himself.”
30. (v. 22 & 23) His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews [the leadership]; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. [and ostracized] Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”
31. (v. 24—34) So for the second time they [the Pharisees] called the man who had been blind, and
32. (v. 24b) they said, “Give glory to God! [this is a kind of oath to tell the truth] We know this man [Jesus] is a sinner.”
33. (v. 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.”
34. (v. 26) They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”
35. (v. 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?”
36. (v. 28) Then 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.”
37. (v. 30—33) 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 one born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”
38. (v. 34) They answered him, “You were born entirely in sin [judging from his blindness] and you are trying to teach us?” And they threw him out.
39. (v. 35—41) **Jesus** Jesus heard that they had driven him out and, when he found him,
40. (v. 35b—38) he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”
41. (v. 36) He answered, “Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him.”
42. (v. 37) Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”
43. (v. 38) He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshipped him.
44. (v. 39) Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” [This is a complicated saying. Jesus, as the light of the world, shines brightly, illuminating those who trust in themselves and their own piety, and those who humbly trust in God’s love and goodness.]
45. (v. 40) Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” [They were certain about their own answers and they don’t want to be confused by Jesus]
46. (v. 41) Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But, now that you say, ‘We see’, your sin remains.” [Because they are so certain of their own righteousness, they have no openness to understanding their own need for grace and forgiveness, so they reject it.]
47. So, what?

Well, here’s the question: Are our eyes open or closed? Are we awake or asleep? The wilderness is the place to ask these questions. And the wilderness is the place to answer these questions. The wilderness is the place to be awakened, to have new vision, to experience new life.

So, what does new awareness, new vision, new life look like in your day-to-day? What do these things look like in your life at The Holy Way in this wilderness season? How can you be the voice of encouragement? How can you be the one who will listen without judging? How can you be the voice of hope?

How can you prepare the way for the person God is already calling to serve this church as its next pastor?

Are you finding your vision in this wilderness? And are you faithfully walking alongside your sisters and brothers? May it be so. Amen