

Sermon by Rev. Allison Beaulieu
Glenshaw Presbyterian Church
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“Eye-Witness”

When I tell this story, only a handful of people ever believe. Some will listen to me with their eyes wide, nodding at me with affirmation once in awhile but after I finish, they leave snickering, doubting that a story like this could possibly be true. Still others chastise me saying, “Who are you? You’re just a blind man. And a crazy one at that.” And then they leave me without a care in the world, without thinking twice about the way my life has been changed—without thinking twice about the way theirs could.

I always begin this story recounting what it’s like to be blind. Being blind is living in swollen darkness. Being blind is never knowing what the leaves look like in the fall when all their colors are changing from deep forest green to crisp yellow-orange. Being blind is never seeing the cacophony of colors infused throughout the sky as the sun is setting on a warm summer night. Being blind is never seeing, really seeing, the people that you love. When you can hear a child’s voice and feel their soft embrace, but not see their innocent eyes, there is something missing. Being blind means being alone—alone in a dark, cold world where people are unforgiving.

I sat on this stoop right here in Jerusalem almost every day. The sun would beat down on my skin and I would often get exhausted from the sheer intensity of it. I had nowhere else to go, though. I was an outcast, a stranger, and most people simply ignored me. Oh, don’t get me wrong, they would see me, literally “see” me, but all they saw was a hopeless man who didn’t merit one moment of their attention. Begging was my life because I couldn’t find work. There were few jobs as it was. A blind man had no chance at providing a decent life for his family. Begging was extremely hard for me. I didn’t want to rely on anyone, but I had no other choice. This, I figured, was my lot in life—to be a blind beggar.

One day, I heard a group of people approaching me. Hoping for some food or maybe even money, I put out my hands far and wide into the air. I was reaching in front of me, reaching for anything. Suddenly I heard a man ask, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man

or his parents, that he was born blind?" I expected to hear the usual answer, that I was a sinner unworthy of even the scraps under the table. But, I almost couldn't believe my ears. The leader of this group of people said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." Never before had I thought my life had meaning, until this faceless man breathed these words.

And then, I shall never forget it. I heard this man spit into the mud—the mud that also covered my entire body—my feet, my ragged clothes, my hair. This was the mud I lived in day after relentless day. But, right then and there, the mud took on new meaning. The healer put the nice cool mud on my eyes. He rubbed the mud as if he was rubbing the finest lotion into my skin. He let the mud sink deep into my pores and it felt like sparks of electricity where I had previously felt nothing. He then told me to wash in the pool of Siloam. I knew the general location of the pool, for when I was thirsty, I'd beg for a traveler to take me there. As I washed my eyes, drops of mud fell from my eyes and pieces of the world I never knew came into view. I was scared at first, for everything was new. My eyes were aching because they were so sensitive to the light, but slowly I began to see colors, then figures, then faces. I slowly began to realize that I had been healed.

When the community realized that my healing had occurred, they were divided over this prophet who had opened my eyes. Since he had healed me on the Sabbath, the Pharisees claimed that he was a sinner because he was not following the laws of Moses. But, I argued with them and told them that this prophet opened my eyes and the only one that can perform these miracles is someone who is sent by God. They became enraged when I tried to explain and they refused to listen to me. Two large men picked up my emaciated body and threw me out of their presence. My body hit the cold, hard, mud-filled street.

This prophet-man must have heard how the authorities rejected and abused me, because the next thing I remembered was that very same prophet standing right beside of me. He asked me to sit down on this same stoop and to talk with him. How could I resist the one who had healed me? He spoke in a soft voice, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" I said, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." The prophet, Jesus, paused and then said, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." And as he said this, there was something about this man, some depth in his eye, some

sincerity in his voice, some aura that made a homeless man feel home. There was something about him that made me overcome with emotion. I could do nothing else but fall to my knees, my head laid flat in the mud that gave me sight. I lifted my head ever so slightly, eyes filled with tears. My eyes connected with his. He reached out and held my face in his hands. Practically breathless I said, “Lord, I believe you!” I believe you. I believe.”

That was the last time I ever saw Jesus.

It’s been twenty years now since that healing. I’m now an old man. In my old age, being susceptible to all kinds of infirmity, I have lost my eye-sight once again. What once had been a landscape of color has now become darkness again. But, I am changed. Some people say that sin is a moral category, a transgression of the law. But, I say that sin is a rejection of the Great Healer. Sin is what you do when Jesus Christ is standing before you and you are a witness to miracles both big and small and yet you still say, “I don’t believe.” Seeing, really seeing, is when Jesus Christ is standing before you, and God’s works are so evident, they are all around you – right in your midsts, and all you can do is fall on your knees and say, “I believe. I believe.”

I may be blind again. I may once again be in the shadows, vulnerable and abused by those who pass me by. But, I see. I see Light. I see brilliant color. I see Love standing right in front of me with mud stained tear-filled eyes. I see Christ. Friends, I once was blind, but now, Hallelujah, I see. Praise God! Amen.