

John 9:1-41^{vvi}

As he 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 the 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; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; 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 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 driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to

them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

v About the Gospel: John 9:1-41

John uses a healing story as a commentary on 8:12, an enactment of the triumph of light over darkness. The belief in a causal relationship between sin and suffering was widespread, but Jesus turns the attention from cause to purpose—the manifestation of God's works through Jesus' ministry.

The interrogations that the healed man and his parents undergo become in effect a trial of Jesus. The increasing insight of the man is contrasted with the hardening blindness of the Pharisees. The man, who is not afraid to confess his ignorance, progresses from seeing Jesus as a man to seeing him as a prophet, then asserting that Jesus must be from God, and finally worshiping him as the Son of Man, through whom God would usher in the final era of judgment and salvation (v. 39).

The Pharisees are at first divided. Some are open but others, by applying the test of Deuteronomy 13:1-5, see Jesus as a sabbath-breaker, either for healing a non-life-threatening illness and/or for kneading the clay and anointing on the sabbath.

For the man born blind, however, his healing is more than sight regained. It is a new creation, a gift of light in order to see Jesus and believe in him.

vi Reflection and Response

Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, the prevailing understanding of illness was that it came from God, the result of sin. The disciples, however, find a flaw in the theory: if illness was the result of sin, how could a tiny baby be afflicted? How could a man born blind be culpable? Passing the buck to the parents hardly seems fair.

Jesus turns from the verbal and intellectual exercise to the direct, and in this case dirty, work of healing the individual. It is as if he deliberately chooses the most basic elements—spit and mud—to show his preference for action over theory.

Ironically, the cure causes a flurry of theorizing. It threatens authorities whose positions are entrenched, and who refuse to let facts interfere with assumptions. The Pharisees would never dirty their robes or their rules with spittle, dirt or (God forbid) humanity!

As they question the cured man, he responds with courage-tinged with sarcasm. The authorities resent his plain, unlearned speech and become defensive as he bares the holes in their arguments. Confronting unvarnished truth, they resort to the same tired theories. Their strategies fail because the man speaks fearlessly, refusing to be intimidated.

Jesus seeks the man out, in contrast to the authoritarian method of summoning him. Unbothered by the man's ignorance of his identity, Jesus explains, You-with your new power of sight-have seen the Son of Man. Perhaps it was for that moment of recognition that the man's sight was restored. In a stunning gesture of belief, he bows before the Lord.

As Jesus diagnoses the Pharisees' blindness, we must ask to what extent the diagnosis is also ours. We are not guilty because we have limited sight (that is the human condition), but because we do not bring our impaired vision to Jesus.