

## Lent 4: John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39

"God gives true sight"

**"Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.**

My brothers and my sisters in Christ Jesus, if you happened to be outside on the night of March 2nd, now a couple of weeks ago, you would have seen a few things: a clear sky, a small sliver of a moon, and if you were observant, two brilliant stars suspended just over the horizon, almost touching each other.

But in reality they weren't stars, but the planets Jupiter and Venus. In astronomer's talk, the two planets are said to be coming into conjunction. For the rest of us non-astronomers, it has been described as the planets *"coming in closer and closer for a little nighttime kiss."* Well, it better be a good kiss because the next time these planets will be that close is 2032.

But here's the thing. They're not close. 400 million miles actually separate them. What appears to our eyes to being just a thumb width away, is an unfathomable distance in reality.

Oh, what a great metaphor for us gathered in God's House! It demands we ask (and answer) these two questions; first, are we really close to God or, like Jupiter and Venus, do our eyes deceive us? And second, how is it that we truly see him?

First, are we really close to God? Throughout the Bible, we have plenty of people who give the appearance of being close to God, but in reality are very far away. In John 9, this is no different with the Pharisees. The Pharisees have all the appearances of being very devout followers, ones who truly see and walk with God.

They are the ones who studied the Old Testament. They are the ones who could quote and spew the rules that God had given. In this account, they are so concerned with God's rules about the Sabbath, that they open an investigation against the man who was healed to make sure that God's rules were being followed. But if you are aware of much of the New Testament, you know that these Pharisees only had the appearance of morality. They are the whitewashed tombs, looking good on the outside but in reality a large chasm between them and true righteousness.

The way they defined their relationship, their closeness, their sight of God was always by themselves and their actions. They justified themselves by comparing themselves to others. Pointing out the sin and the unrighteousness of others to prop themselves up by comparison. They even tell the blind man outright: **"You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!"**

But the Pharisees weren't the only ones, even the disciples show evidence of this same attitude when they ask: **"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"** They assumed that, by the outward appearance of this man, that he was a sinner and far away from salvation. And by comparison, they were much better.

Both the Pharisees, and the disciples had given the appearance of being close to God, of having true sight, but in reality being very blind, very far. Jesus corrects the disciple's false assumptions and later in the account says to the Pharisees: **"If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains".**

Let's head back to the Jupiter and Venus analogy for a moment. What we learned is that we cannot rely on our eyes. Our vision often deceives us. So also, in our moral lives. We cannot rely on our feelings, or our thoughts, or society or even our consciences to determine how close we are walking with God. Looking at our own actions cannot be the barometer for our status before God. How much we feel saved is not an accurate rule of our salvation. Pointing out the sins of others does not, in fact, give us a more accurate picture of our own righteousness.

So, how do we know? How do we become sure of our status with God? How is it that we truly see God? To see how God operates, we need look no further than the way God deals with the blind man. A man who was seen as a sinner and, innately of that sin, so very far away from God.

First, Jesus comes to the sinner. The blind man does not seek him out. Nobody asks Jesus to heal him. Jesus finds the man, not once, but twice. He finds him blind and gives him sight. He finds him after being kicked out of the synagogue and brings him comfort.

Second, Jesus gives him something only God can give. The restoration of sight is Jesus most frequent of miracles. It is an action that is attributed only to God in the Old Testament and done by Christ in the New. After physical sight, Jesus gives him an even more important sight. He gives him true spiritual sight. Jesus comes and gives him the true knowledge of the Son of Man: the Messiah. The one who came to forgive his sins.

The sinner is precisely the one whom God brings close. He closes the immeasurable distance himself. He comes to the blind man who was so hopeless and gives him something that only God can give. It's all Jesus' initiative, it's all Jesus' work. The sinner is made near, is brought close, is given true sight, by the actions of Christ.

Your Jesus, does the same thing for you spiritually. Even though you and I were steeped in sin at birth, by our very natures far from God, without true fear or love of him. Even though you and I were blind and lost. Even though we fall into the temptation of trying to justify ourselves by our feelings, our actions, or comparing ourselves to others. God sought us out.

God saw you 400 million miles away from him, and came looking for you. He saw you broken, blind, defeated, and found you to bring you to himself. He brought you to a pool of water where your blindness was washed away, when at your baptism, he sent his Holy Spirit to wash away your sins and create faith in your heart.

God gives to you, by his actions, the forgiveness of sins. Through his Holy Gospel, he strengthens your faith in his life and his death, which give the promise of a robe of righteousness and a status as his true follower, something that only he can give.

Today, Christ comes to you, to give you something that only he can give. When he comes to you in a wafer that is more than just bread, but is his very body. A cup that is more than just wine, but is his very blood. And there, as he comes to you, he brings you close to himself and offers the forgiveness of sins.

You, Christian, are called into a new relationship, one based not on fear, not defined by distance, but characterized by closeness. You truly see your Lord, you are truly saved.

Likewise, you are not 400 million miles from God, but united to him. This closeness, this glorious sight, this salvation, all due to the actions of all made sure by the promises of your Savior. Amen.