

John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39

When I was a boy I remember going once with my father, who was a Lutheran pastor, to a town which was a number of hours from where we lived where there was a Lutheran Home for the Blind. He led a worship service there. I was amazed at how the people in the pews sang the hymns so well, at how they followed through the liturgy of the service just as we did at my home church, and at how they sat quietly and listened intently to the sermon. I was saddened to realize that not one of those worshipers could see my dad preaching to them; could see the colorful paraments draping the altar, or the flowers, or the beautiful architecture. Looking back now, I do not think the only reason my dad took me there that day was because my mother was working and so he had to take me with him. I think he wanted me to see those blind worshipers...to make an impression upon me. In one way those men and women were blind, but in another way they could see just as clearly as I could see. For when it came to Jesus, and their faith in Him, and their love for Him, they had perfect vision.

The story of the man born blind in John 9 is not simply a story meant to demonstrate the power of God. It is intended as a story in which we today are able to check our vision. We may believe that we can see just fine, that we're not blind in any way, shape, or form. As a result we do not think that we have much in common with the blind man of our text. But there is more to this story than meets the eye. The Pharisees had nothing in common with the blind man--or so they thought. He was blind, they could see. He was born in utter sin, they were not. Even Jesus' disciples shared their sentiments when they asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"

Jesus did not concern Himself with this man's past, but with his present and his future. More important than the question of how he came to be blind was the question of how God would deal with this man. Where he came from was not as important as where he was going. And for a blind man to go anywhere, he must be led.

The Pharisees refused to be led for they did not think they were blind. They had no use for seeing-eye dogs or walking sticks, but what's more, they had no use for Jesus. No one was going to lead them, not John the Baptist, not Jesus, not anyone, because they were not blind. Yet those men and women worshiping at the Lutheran Home for the Blind could see much better, much clearer than those Pharisees. These Lutheran men and women knew they were blind, they knew they were sinners in need of a Savior, they loved to hear the good news of Jesus. "I came to this world," says Jesus, "That those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."

Which one are you? If you, like the Pharisees, do not like to be led, then you are more blind than you think you are. But if you know your blind condition, if you acknowledge your sin and desire the good news of Christ--His Word and Sacraments--then you see just as clearly as those Lutheran men and women in the Home for the Blind.

"As long as I am in the world," says Jesus, "I am the Light of the world." How does an eye see? Centuries ago it was believed that light was emitted from the eye; that people could see objects around them because of light emanating out from the eye toward those objects. But then it was discovered that the eye worked by light coming into the eye. Even before the time of Christ, people came to the understanding that without a source of light from outside the eye, the eye could see nothing. In total darkness everyone is blind. There is no light coming into anyone's eye. But in a room with light, or out in the daylight, the eye sees by receiving light into it.

Spiritual blindness, therefore, is when Jesus, the Light of the world, is not entering into someone's life. The eye can only receive light, and so when the Light of the world is absent, that person is spiritually blind. Such were the Pharisees. They could see Jesus just fine. Their eyes beheld Him day after day. But He as their Light was not entering into them. They refused to be led by Him. They rejected His claim to be the Son of God. They despised His teaching. Therefore they were blind because they were shutting out He who is the Light of the world.

No matter how well, or how poorly, your eyes work, if you are being led by Jesus; if your life revolves around His Word and Sacraments, then you are able to see because Jesus is the Light coming into you. But if you or I resist His leading because we think we see well enough--we do not need His words that much, we do not need His Sacrament so often-- then we are living as those who are blind because we are shutting out Jesus our true Light.

No one is so blind as those who refuse to see. May God lead us to repent of our stubborn attitude, of our callous way of thinking that we are doing fine, that we clearly see where we are going in life, that we are able to lead ourselves. And may God lead us to His mercy in Christ that He may lead us in the way of eternal life.

"I am the Light of the world," says Jesus, "As long as I am in the world." But He was not in the world very long, was He? Those who hated Him moved quickly to put out His light. They nailed Him to a cross. They did not want to live in the light of Jesus. They preferred the darkness. So now what? "As long as I am in the world," He says. But now that He was crucified, and rose again, and ascended on high, is He still our Light? Yes, for He promises, "Lo, I am with you always." How? Where? When the sun shines from the sky, that is not Jesus. When we light a match or flip on a light switch, that is not Jesus our true Light. He points us to His Word and Sacraments. In Baptism, in Holy Absolution, in the Lord's Supper, in His Gospel--in these holy things Jesus is and remains the Light of the world.

Those who live apart from these Means of Grace are living in darkness and are as blind as the Pharisees. But you who are God's people; you who come here to His House to hear His words; you who live within the waters of your baptism by confessing your sin and hearing and believing the words of forgiveness--you are not blind, you are walking as children of light, you are being led by Christ the Light of the world.

Even when the blind man could see again, he did not trust Jesus as his Savior...not at first. Being able to see Jesus did nothing for him. He called Jesus a prophet, but no more. But when Jesus told him who He was; when Jesus put His words into the ears of that man, then the man who was born blind worshiped Him, then he believed. To see Jesus is nothing. The Pharisees saw Him and they hated Him. But when Jesus, the Light of the world, shines His light upon sinners like us through His Word and Sacraments, then everything becomes clear and we see where we are going--we see heaven before us as our gift in Christ.

Friend, Jesus is shining here on you today. And I don't care how blind you have been, how dark with sin your life has been. Your Light is here for you now. He forgives you for walking in the darkness. He forgives you for living like the Pharisees. Jesus entered the darkness of hell for you on the cross. He was placed into the darkness of the tomb, but He burst forth with glorious light on the third day. And He did all this so that you, right now, have light and life in His name.

No one who is blind will see heaven's light. But you are being led by Christ. You are forgiven of all your sins because He, your Light, died for you, and in Him you now see. As you come up to His Table this morning, and every time you come up, you see, by faith, the saints in heaven gathered with you; you see, by faith, Christ Himself for you in the bread and wine. However dim your eyes have been, when Jesus comes as your Light forgiving your sins, drawing you to Him in faith, your eyes are opened to see more and more of His love and mercy toward you. Amen.