

Lent 4 A Sermon  
John 9:1-41  
March 19, 2023

*“20/20 Vision”*  
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

*As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. [Then] he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, <sup>7</sup>saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” Then he went and washed and came back able to see.*

*<sup>8</sup>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?” <sup>9</sup>Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” <sup>10</sup>But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” <sup>11</sup>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.”*

*<sup>13</sup>They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup>Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup>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.” <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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.”*

*<sup>18</sup>[They] 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 <sup>19</sup>and*

*asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”* <sup>20</sup>*His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;”*<sup>21</sup>*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.”*

<sup>24</sup>*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.”* <sup>25</sup>*He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see . . . Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes . . . Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.* <sup>33</sup>*If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”*

~0~

Some of you have by now met our senior dog, a bearded collie named Mashooq. Mashooq is a fluffy muppet of a dog with long shaggy locks that fall over his eyes making it pretty tough for him to see. From time to time he runs into things in the house: a door, a wall, a chair that’s out of place or, when we’re out walking, the odd mailbox, tree, or stop sign. It’s usually not a big problem though, his not seeing. In fact, he seems to prefer it over the barrettes I sometimes use to tie back his bangs. It’s usually not a big problem, but one time, it kind of was.

We were visiting friends in California for Thanksgiving. When we arrived at the house, we walked through to the back patio where everyone was hanging out before the meal. There was an in-ground pool. Mashooq was following his nose all over the yard, ecstatic with all the new smells and people. A friend commented, “You know, he’s gonna fall in the pool.” Not five seconds later, he did just that – walked right off the patio and into the pool. The look on his face was sheer terror and with his heavy coat, he couldn’t manage to get out of the water on his own. I reached over and dragged him out, sopping wet. Now I was wet too. We made quite a splash that Thanksgiving! The truth about Mashooq is, though he

doesn't see very well with his eyes, he has an uncanny gift of seeing people with his other senses, of knowing their moods, of responding with licks or cuddles or simply with his presence. He really, clearly, sees them.

Our text from the Gospel According to John tells us something about really, clearly, seeing people. Jesus sees a blind man by the road and heals him. It's a long text so I'm not going to walk through it verse by verse and retell the story, but I do want to point out a couple of really important details. Firstly, Jesus is clear that the blind man's condition is not the result of some sin. So often, it's tempting to assume that when someone struggles with something, it's their fault – their sin. Jesus says, "Huh uh. Not so. Sometimes, bad things just happen."

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this isn't just a story of a man who was blind from birth getting his sight. This is a story of a blind man who could already see with his heart, getting 20/20 vision to match. Despite the fact that the blind man hadn't ever even seen Jesus, when asked about Jesus' identity he responded without a second thought, "He is a prophet." Still not satisfied, the Pharisees pressed the formerly blind man further and he testified, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see . . . Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes . . . 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."

This man had never seen Jesus before with his eyes and yet, he really, clearly, saw him. I wonder, how often our own eyes get in the way of us really, clearly, seeing others? How many times have we looked at another person, evaluated them based on their appearance, and decided that we already knew enough without actually getting to know them? Perhaps you know what it feels like to be the one being judged...

A story from author and journalist Malcolm Gladwell's book, *Blink*, invites us to consider a critical question: How often do we see

others without really seeing them? About 30 years ago, the classical music world made a major shift in auditioning potential symphony musicians. Rather than playing directly in front of judges, candidates started performing behind screens. Since the shift, the number of women in top U.S. orchestra positions has increased five-fold!

When Julie Landsman auditioned for the role of principal French horn at the Met, the screens had just gone up in the practice hall. At the time, there were no women in the brass section of the orchestra, because everyone “knew” that women could not play the horn as well as men. But Landsman came and sat down and played—and she played well. “I knew in my last round that I had won before they told me,” she says. “It was because of the way I performed the last piece. I held on to the last high C for a very long time, just to leave no doubt in their minds. And they started to laugh, because it was above and beyond the call of duty.” But when they declared her the winner and she stepped out from behind the screen, there was a gasp. It wasn't just that she was a woman... And it wasn't just the bold high C, which was the kind of macho sound that they expected from a man only. It was because they knew her. Landsman had played for the Met as a substitute. Until they listened to her with just their ears, however, they had no idea she was so good.<sup>1</sup>

While the judges truly believed that they were auditioning musicians fairly, they were in fact being influenced by appearances. How easy it is for us to do the same.

The story of the healing of the man blind from birth reminds us that really, clearly, seeing another person, another human being, is not done just with the eyes. Outward appearances tell a story, but it is not the whole story. To really, clearly, see someone, we have to get close enough to them to experience who they really are. That's when we can know them. That's when we can really, clearly see. May it be so with us. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Malcom Gladwell. *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005.