

**Called to the Light**  
Menno Mennonite Church  
March 19, 2023

**Purpose:** To recall our invitation to come to the one who is the light even in the challenges of life.

**Message:** We are invited to embrace the light of the world who brings us full life.

**Scripture:** John 9:1-12; 24-34 [I will read]; 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23 [please read]; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

**Synopsis:** It can be a struggle to understand the new. There are times where what we expect will outweigh what we believe time and again. Among the most permanent assumptions is that which we anticipate about God. Our formal theology (the things that we say about God) is often overshadowed by our practical theology (how we live the things we think about God). While we proclaim the grace of God and the welcome that God extends, we often live as though God demands our performance adherence to the rules. Jesus time and again invites us to walk in the full light of God that would invite us to know ALL of God's goodness in the full light of Christ's love.

See <http://www.evernote.com/l/APmzsYFpCNhDg6FrAqbm7p6lASg55gOGKl4/> for background

John 9:1-12; 24-34

9:1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.

2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

4 As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

6 After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes.

7 "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?"

9 Some claimed that he was.

Others said, "No, he only looks like him."

But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

10 "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked.

11 He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes.

He told me to go to Siloam and wash.

So I went and washed, and then I could see."

12 "Where is this man?" they asked him.

"I don't know," he said.

*{The Pharisees caught wind of this and questioned the man and his parents, about how this happened. They were convinced that Jesus was a sinner because he had healed this man on the Sabbath.}*

24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind.  
“Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said.  
“We know this man is a sinner.”

25 He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know.  
One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”  
26 Then they asked him, “What did he do to you?  
How did he open your eyes?”

27 He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen.  
Why do you want to hear it again?  
Do you want to become his disciples too?”

28 Then they hurled insults at him and said,  
“You are this fellow’s disciple!  
We are disciples of Moses!

29 We know that God spoke to Moses,  
but as for this fellow,  
we don’t even know where he comes from.”

30 The man answered,  
“Now that is remarkable!  
You don’t know where he comes from,  
yet he opened my eyes.

31 We know that God does not listen to sinners.  
He listens to the godly person who does his will.

32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.  
33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

34 To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth;  
how dare you lecture us!”  
And they threw him out.

More often than not, it is our expectations that determine our reality. Almost more than anything else, what we anticipate in a given situation determines what we ultimately perceive. We all have our norms, our concentrations and expectations. The ways that the world works. How things function, who a hero is and what they look like, what they behave like. When things don't turn out the way we expect, or we have our perceptions played with, it is easy to miss something along the way. What we look for, what we expect to see is frequently all that we see. I came across a video a while back that makes the point rather well.

[video]

Did you see the bear? Honestly the first time through? The Second? Not at all? He was there—trust me. Like the ever magical slight of hand it is when we are looking for one thing and not another that we readily miss what is going on right in front of our eyes.

It is precisely this expectation shift that lies at the center of our text for this morning. It will readily say that this is not my favorite gospel story. Not because it is not fantastic—it is and it speaks to the grace of God and the wonder of Jesus' power in wonderful ways. Yet through the years I have avoided it primarily because I have fielded to the question of the disciples of where the sin lies in my life and my experience to make it something that I relish embracing too often. That is my problem and my loss to be sure, but it does stand mentioning that I find Jesus' response to this central question most pertinent and applicable no matter the circumstance: there is no sin; only the circumstances of the Glory of God at play here. The fact that it is a relevant question is still with us: In a world that we want to make sense we are willing to take what ever pains we must to explain things to our own satisfaction. We want our world to make sense. We want a cause and effect,  $A = B$  and therefore  $C$  sort of reality to the world. We witness things in our world that we lament. A tragedy, problem, or peculiarity rubs against the grain. It is not enough to simply regret what we witness so we try to explain it, try to rationalize the irrational simply because that is what we expect the world to be like—rationally causal where everything can be attributed to its origin if we try hard enough. We expect causality so that is what we get. It is far harder to look beyond what we see as challenge and find the grace nestled within. It is a whole lot easier to seek to explain things then to work to heal them, whether the patient in question is the person suffering on the street or the person looking us in the mirror.

We are always translating our world and our experience between what we know and how we actually live. The rule and the reality We know that we risk being fined and punished, to say

the least, for exceeding the speed limit on the roads. The rule says that we are to go this fast and no faster. But one of the first thing you learn in driving is that the traffic has its own rules, and sometimes it is best to follow those rules than necessarily adhering to the precise letter of the law. To do so is a great way to get run over; not to get a ticket. So we go with the spirit rather than the intent of the law. We do this all the time in every area of life; we believe and think one thing, but are inclined and often do another. That doesn't make us a hypocrite. It makes us human.

What we say about God is no different. Quite often we have 2 different types of theology: the stuff that we SAY about God and the way that we live within our experience of God. This is called formal and practical theology. Formal is precisely what it sounds like—the things we say about God and God's characteristics in the creeds and the Sunday School answers: that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died, was buried and rose on the third day; that God is all loving and all encompassing—the formal preconditions of faith that we know and work with well. But then we have practical theology which is the way that we live our faith in the day-to-day. Sometimes the translation from formal to practical, sometimes it does not. Like God may well be all loving, but likely God is rather disappointed in me, perhaps because I am. Or that while we believe that God remains capable of heling our many ills, the healing of body mind and Spirit by way of the simple remedy simply no longer exists, is out of reach, or is incomplete spare the special few because try though we might that which we would have healed sticks with us well beyond expectation. We can speak of a loving parenting God while feeling the tension of receiving a model of parenting that was anything but. There can be inconsistencies between what we proclaim and what we expect. Again, that doesn't make us unfaithful or inconsistent; it simply reveals the disconnect that is so often present in our lives and our living and the things that we know to be true about the one who created us as we are. Sometimes the most difficult step on the path to spiritual healing, especially from personal pain and trauma is imagining a God of the universe who can fully love us, warts and all, when we struggle hard to love ourselves. Conversely, when expect to find judgement quite often that is precisely what we find, whether it is there realistically or not.

This is precisely what is going on in this story. Everyone is expecting to find what they know to be true and how they have explained the unexplainable: there is sin therefore there is consequence. But Jesus' sight is not so filtered. Yet when the man born blind is healed, it is the

expectations of the community around him that complicate matters. The Pharisees who are investigating the man born blind and how he was healed came with a specific assumption about what it meant to be a good person, and they were pretty sure Jesus wasn't it. His most recent infraction here simply confirms what they already know. The Sabbath must be maintained and therefore healing on the sabbath cannot make sense to them. It only cements the liability that they know Jesus to be. They could not accept the healing given them because it broke their expectations of how this works. They were not looking for Grace and so missed the glory of God as it walked right on by. The whole community was in an uproar simply because the script has changed and the one that had been on the outside was now healed and they needed to see what to do with him to make things make sense again. It is far easier to maintain the expectation of sin than to reformulate their cause and effect of what came first.

As hard as it is for the pharisees to find their way into this, it is equally difficult for the one who was formerly blind. He was healed. He is still enjoying his first moments of sight, but no one is celebrating. Instead they are still stuck in analysis. His parents throw him under the bus too, putting their place in the community as far more important than that of the healing of their son. They couldn't see the way forward either, not knowing what to make of the mystery of healing. In the end, it is the boldness of the healed man that tells the tale. After he is thrown out from the court of the Pharisees, he meets Jesus again, seeing him for the first time. Learning who he is and what it means to follow him, he falls down and worships Jesus giving thanks for God's work in Jesus. Because at the end of all of the layers of analysis and judgement, he knew one thing: he was given the gift of his life, and for that he was grateful to God. It is in this that he can celebrate and in that he can break out of the expectations that everyone has of God's way and means in the world.

Were they casting the play of this interchange with all of its acts and characters, I would love to play the one healed. There is such wonder, hope, and spirit going on there. Yet in this short play of the kingdom of God I suspect that I am far better suited to the role of the doubter, the explainer, the inspector who cannot see what they are presented with because they are looking for something else. Not because I am bad, but because I know too painfully well how well-tether my expectations of God can be. As much as we might like to say otherwise, I think that is where I guess many of us would find ourselves. We have been part of this messy thing called church for long enough that we suspect we are about as shaped and formed as we are

going to get, with noting new really ever going on under the Sun. We know the Sunday School answers, sure, but our practical applied theology tends to be a bit more heavily bound by the expectations of rule than given to perceiving the Spirit flitting where it will. In short, I am guessing we find ourselves with the wondering Pharisees perhaps more readily than with the man rejoicing. That is probably why we are so uncomfortable with their response. Few of us can number ourselves among the outsiders, even if we would like to think we could play that part in a pinch. It is never fun to come to realize that you are not the hero in the story after all. We see ourselves in the midst of the expectations and that is never comfortable.

But we are left with a choice. Even as we acknowledge that we do expect a rational and reasoned world, we need not stay there. We have a choice. We have the ability and the invitation to see beyond our expectations and be surprised. In naming our inclinations of what we expect to happen—that God prospers those who are prosperous and punishes those who, at time struggles, we begin to recast our role in the story from skeptic to curious bystander that manages to say “Wow; I don’t know or understand what this is, but to God be the glory. I celebrate that you are healed.” Or the life-long friend who has stood beside the person through good and bad and can finally rejoice in saying “thanks be to God for all that God has done”. There are many ways to walk the way healing in our lives and it is far more important that we keep on walking in faithful hope of God’s healing than it is that we understand what is going on, or that the movements particularly fit our models for how all of this is supposed to work. We get to choose how we are called to incarnate Christ to those who are healing; we choose how to love, and that makes all the difference.

May God’s kingdom ever defy our expectations and call us to look beyond even that which we expect to see.