

"Who is Blind?" A sermon based on John 9:1-41 and 1 Samuel 16:1-13 delivered on the Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 15, 2026, by the Rev. Alison Dutton Jacobs at the First Congregational UCC of Onekama, Michigan.

Today is the infamous "Ides of March." A wise Seer is said to have warned Julius Caesar to beware of this date in 44 B.C.E. Caesar seemed "blind" to this warning and was assassinated by 60 Senators who stabbed him 23 times so that he collapsed at the feet of a statue of his rival Pompey. This happened a little less than a half century before the birth of Christ. It backfired on the conspirators who were seeking to prevent Caesar's monarchical ambitions and preserve the Republic; but which, instead, led to civil wars and the establishment of the Roman Empire. Who was the blind one? Caesar or the 60 Senators?

When God instructs Samuel to go to Bethlehem to anoint a new King for Israel, Samuel is blinded by his fear of the dethroned King Saul and, at first, is afraid to follow God's instructions. When the candidates for kingship are brought before Samuel one by one, Samuel is initially ready to anoint Eliab, but God has other ideas. Seven sons were brought before Samuel, and all were rejected. Only the youngest, brought from tending the sheep, is the one God chooses. Samuel is blind until his eyes are opened by God's desires for him.

In our John passage this morning, we encounter a truly blind man in the physical sense. The unnamed man has been blind since birth and seemingly continues to be blind to his neighbors. Almost every character in this drama that unfolds in John's gospel in five distinct scenes is blinder than ever the focal character of this story had been!

Verses 1-7 COULD be entitled "Jesus, the Disciples, and the blind man" as one commentator suggests, but aren't the disciples really the ones to be shown up as being blind to the truth, when they ask their question, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Isn't it the

disciple's blind ignorance that comes across here in their assumption that blindness was somehow a punishment for someone's sins? And wasn't it the so-called "Blind man" that trusted this strange itinerate Rabbi to slather mud and spit on his eyes, and then to go to the stream and wash that actually came back sighted? Wasn't it this so called "blind" man that was perceptive enough to trust Jesus with his eyes and his future?

Who were the blind ones? Wouldn't the title "Jesus, the blind disciples, and the healed man" be a more fitting title for this scene? And what about verses 8-12? Should the title be "The blind man and his neighbors?" or would it more properly read, "the blind neighbors meet the healed man for the first time?" For don't the neighbors who have passed him by day after day as he sat begging, not recognize him now that he can see and now that he is their equal and does not have to beg? Don't the neighbors actually say "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" and then answer their own question with "No, it is just someone who looks like him!" They don't believe him. For the neighbors the phrase "seeing is believing" definitely does not apply!

Then there are the Pharisees in verses 13 to 34 who don't even believe that the man had been blind to start with. They, are blind to his situation, so to speak and so they contact his parents, who in their fear of being put out of the synagogue, wash their hands of the Pharisaic discussion all together by saying 'Ask him: he is of age.' And the Pharisee's also show their lack of vision when all they can concentrate on is that Jesus healed on the Sabbath, and not the result of that healing. In essence, they all are acting as blind as bats!

And then, we get to the climax, for this formerly blind man, now has to open the eyes of the Pharisees himself. The Pharisees, having called him for a second time, still do not believe him and question him over and over: 'What did he do to you? Isn't he a sinner? How did he open your eyes?' In

their blindness to the possibilities, the Pharisees label Jesus a sinner for he worked on the Sabbath and in doing so they totally overlook and fail to see the fact that only God can heal, and that Jesus has done just that. They are blind to the divine touch in this action. And so, the now Sighted Man must set them straight. In a speech which reeks with sarcasm, the man says:

"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

But, of course, in their blind rage at being spoken to this way by one less worthy than they, they continue in their blindness and throw the man out. Thus ends a scene which more properly should be titled, not "The blind man, the parents, and the Pharisees," but "The sighted man, his short-sighted parents, and the blind teachers of the law."

Then finally we have two scenes to tie up the drama. In the scene usually entitled "Jesus and the Blind man" found in verses 35-38, we see the man, not blind at all, seeing Jesus clearly for what he is, the Messiah. And, not only that, but we also see a man of vision who has emerged from his blind shell offering his faith, loyalty, and worship to Jesus. This scene should read, "The Insightful Man and his Messiah."

The last scene ties everything together. In verses 39-41 we hear Jesus, echoing his own words in Matthew Chapter 13, and Mark Chapter 4,

where he quotes from the call of God to the prophet Isaiah and says this prophecy has been fulfilled. And what is that quote, from Isaiah 6:9? "Go and say to this people, . . . keep looking, but do not understand, make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed."

This quote is paraphrased by Jesus in John when he says, " I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." And, then and only then, do the Pharisee's ears perk up, for they are sure they are not the blind ones! Eavesdropping on Jesus' words to the man that they have just thrown out, they say "surely we aren't blind, are we?" Hoping against hope, that Jesus will agree with them! But they must be disappointed when Jesus says their sin has given them away.

"Surely we are not blind, are we?" It is our own cry painfully echoed in that Pharisaic question. For whom is really blind? Is it the law that says social workers must seek to return an abused child to their biological parents, if at all possible, even though statistics show that they will continue to be abused or is it the social workers who fight that law and find loopholes not to follow it when they know the child is in grave danger.

Who is blind? Is it the tobacco companies that spend millions of dollars to promote a health hazard from which they profit, and thousands of more dollars to keep the research about the dangers of smoking out of the hands of the public, or is it the lawyers who are suing on behalf of victims of lung cancer?

Who is blind? Unfortunately, we are all at times. But the Good News is that Jesus has come to change that. The Good News as we journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem in this Lenten season is that Jesus will not allow

us to stay blind forever. As the days are lengthening, and the light stays with us longer, Jesus can enlighten us all through his message and through his life, lived well and fully. Jesus can uncloud our eyes through his death which glorified God and can sweep away our blindness to God's workings in this hurting world. But in order to obtain this healing, we must first, like the character in our story today accept Jesus as our Messiah. We must drop the scales from our eyes and say with him "Lord, I believe." Would you do that with me now? Would you stay right where you are in the pew and make this clear statement of faith with me?

Say, "Lord, I believe!" "Lord, I believe!" "Lord, I believe!"

Amen.

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