

March 15, 2026
Lent IV, Year A
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Lord...Help Me See!

At my 10-year high school reunion, I was talking to someone I hadn't seen in well 10 years. She asked me what I was up to these days. I told her I was an Episcopal priest. And after she stopped laughing, she asked again, "No really...what do you do?"

How could that shy, kind of goofy kid who spent half of high school sneezing possibly lead a church? Obviously, my answer didn't fit the narrative she had about who she thought I was. I guess I shouldn't have been that surprised.

We all carry certain ideas about other people. We place people into categories based on what we think we know about them. In a complicated world, those categories help us locate people in the big picture. They help us make sense of things.

While categories can help us make sense of things, they can also prevent us from seeing past the labels we inevitably put on people. These labels limit our vision even our ability to love. Once we think we know who someone is, it becomes difficult to imagine them being anything else.

The story of who they are is already written in our minds. And when reality contradicts that story, we try to rationalize. We laugh it off or dismiss reality in favor of our own worldview. To accept reality would mean to invite change. And who likes change?

I believe that is happening throughout today's Gospel.

Jesus and his disciples encounter a man who has been blind since birth. Immediately the disciples ask a question that reveals the narrative they have been formed by. It is a narrative that wants to blame someone for the man's blindness. They ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents?"

I don't think the question is malicious. But I do think it carries a dangerous assumption. In their worldview, suffering must have a cause that can be assigned to someone. Someone must be held responsible.

Now there certainly are times when suffering is connected to sin and when certain individuals or institutions should be held responsible. But that's not what's going on here or at least Jesus isn't interested in going down that road.

Jesus rejects that way of seeing the world in favor of another one. Throughout the scriptures the focus is rarely on figuring out where evil came from. The focus is on what God is doing about it.

And here Jesus shows us exactly what God is doing. Jesus does not blame the man. Jesus does not blame the parents. Instead, he heals the man born blind.

And this should be a reason to rejoice. A man who has never seen before suddenly opens his eyes and sees the world for the first time. You would expect celebration. You would expect joy.

But that is not what happens. Instead, everyone begins arguing about it, because the healing doesn't fit their narrow worldview and their categories.

The neighbors are the first to start the gossiping. Some say, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Others say, "No, it can't be him." Even when the man insists, "I am the man," they struggle to accept this new reality.

Because the person standing before them does not match who they always assumed him to be. In their minds he is the blind beggar who sits by the road asking for help. But now this man can see.

That change disrupts their categories. It causes disorientation. It forces them to reconsider where they fit in a world where they no longer get to look down on this man.

So, they begin questioning him. How did this happen? Who did this? What exactly took place?

Eventually the religious leaders get involved. And that is when the questioning intensifies. They interrogate the man again and again. Maybe they even laugh him off and say, "No really...what happened?"

They question the man's parents. But even the man's own parents, the ones who are supposed to stand up for him, don't want any part of this conversation. So, the religious leaders bring the man back for another round of questioning.

As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that they are not really searching for the truth. Instead, they want an answer that satisfies their tightly held assumptions.

Because if the answer they are hearing is true, then a whole set of beliefs has to change. Beliefs about who God is, how sin works, and what grace means.

For starters, the man who healed him, Jesus, heals on the Sabbath. And in their mind, that means Jesus cannot be a true prophet or healer.

So, if the healing is real, then their understanding of God might be wrong. Their authority might be challenged. The categories they rely on to locate themselves in the story might begin to shift.

So rather than reconsider their assumptions, they keep asking questions, hoping the story will fit the narrative they live by so they don't have to change.

At this point the healed man finally grows tired of the questioning. After they ask him again how it happened, he responds with a little bit of wit. "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

Suddenly the beggar is the one asking the questions. He's the one with the jokes. The man who was once the object of everyone's questions is now the one teaching the lesson. The man who used to beg in the shadows now speaks with a courage and confidence that these religious leaders seem to have lost.

The man didn't just receive physical healing. Something inside him has changed. Grace has given him not only his sight, but also his voice.

With their backs against the wall, the religious leaders misuse their power to try and silence the man. They use their authority to send the man away. Jesus knows something about what it means to be cast out. So when Jesus hears that the man has been cast out, what does he do?

After all the arguments and interrogations, after the man has been rejected by the community, and even by his own parents, Jesus goes looking for him. This detail in the story tells us something important about the nature of God. When the world casts someone out, Christ seeks them out. When others turn away from us, Christ turns toward us.

The man who once sat alone in blindness now finds himself seen, known, and loved by the one who healed him. And in that encounter with Jesus the man's vision becomes complete. When Jesus asks if he believes, the man responds, "Lord, I believe." And he worships him.

I hope you are picking up on the irony running through this story. The only person who ends up seeing clearly is the one who began the story blind. Everyone else believes they already understand how the world works.

They are certain. Certain about sin. Certain about suffering. Certain about what God does and does not do. And that certainty keeps them from recognizing the grace standing right in front of them.

The man who was healed, on the other hand, doesn't pretend to understand everything. He simply tells the truth of what happened to him. "I was blind... now I see."

He doesn't explain the mystery. Instead, he proclaims the mystery as truth. In other words, he would make a great Episcopalian.

The man simply bears witness to what God has done and trusts his witness to do its work. Sometimes telling the truth is enough. The moment we start trying to explain everything instead of simply proclaim what God has done, we risk missing the grace standing right in front of us.

And that is where this story meets us today.

The real tragedy in today's lesson is not that there was a man born blind. The real tragedy is that the people who think they see clearly cannot recognize the grace standing right in front of them.

Grace often appears in ways that do not fit the narratives and assumptions we carry about the world. Sometimes grace appears through the very people we have rejected. Sometimes grace shows up through change we didn't ask for.

Sometimes grace disrupts the way things have always been. Grace rearranges things. Grace reminds us that life is not governed simply by our idea of how the world should work, but by the surprising generosity of God. Ultimately, grace changes the way we see the world.

And when our vision changes, we are freed to love God and one another more fully, which, as Emily reminded us last week, is how a broken and sinful world begins to heal.

At the end of today's gospel lesson, Jesus issues something of a warning. "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." In other words, the greatest obstacle to seeing God's grace isn't necessarily a lack of faith. Rather, it is the assumption that we already understand everything clearly.

However, faith begins to grow exactly when we admit that we aren't certain and that we can only see clearly through the eyes of Christ. Faith does not begin with certainty. It begins with humility. Those who are full of themselves leave no room for God's grace.

When Christ begins to change the way we see, we start to let go of the assumptions we carry about others, the narrow categories we place people in. Instead, we begin to see people for who they truly are. Beloved children of God, each carrying a complicated story not so different from our own. A story where we all long to be seen, known, and loved. A story fulfilled in the good news of Jesus. The One who comes looking for us.

The good news is that Jesus does not come looking for people who think they see perfectly. A well person has no need of a doctor. Instead, Jesus seeks those who know they are blind.

He comes looking for people hungry enough to pray, “Lord... help me see.”

Amen.