

Isaiah 42:1, 5-7 (New Revised Standard Version)

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

John 9:1, 5-11, 14-16, 24-25 (New Revised Standard Version)

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 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?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 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." Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 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." 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. 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." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

As a young boy, one of my favorite places to explore and play
was the swamp back in the woods not too far from our house,
where I liked to turn over big rocks and attempt
to grab all sorts of slimy creatures before they
could scamper away and slither off into the darkness.

And then later on, I'd see swamp plants and grasses growing,
and new life would flourish where the light could now shine
into those exposed places that had been covered by rocks.

That contrast between light and darkness also serves as metaphor
that's frequently used in John's Gospel, 3 epistles and Revelation
to describe Jesus as the Light sent into our sin-darkened world,
and to describe how that Light of God's grace through Jesus Christ,
exposes, cleanses, heals, saves, transforms our sin-darkened lives.

The Gospel of John was written
several decades after the events being described had occurred,
and is told in a way that is to illustrate theological truths,
with much deeper meaning than just telling about what happened.

On the most basic & literal level our text is a simple miracle story,
in which Jesus, sees a man who was born blind and heals him, vs. 1, 5-7.

As he (Jesus) walked along, he saw a man **blind from birth**. As long as I am in the world, **I am the light of the world.**" When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and **came back able to see.**

The man blind from birth sitting helpless in the darkness of blindness,
is a metaphor or symbol for us and our world estranged from God,
who are living in darkness without the true Light... as sinners,
and because we choose darkness rather than the light,

that results in behavior contrary to the will of God.

It is also a story about God's grace that heals and saves sinners.

So in the story, what does the blind man do or say to qualify
or to prove his worthiness for Jesus to notice and heal him?

The man's only qualification is that he is blind,
he can't see light and he is in need of healing.

Jesus notices & heals the man, a beggar who was blind from birth,
which connects with vs. 1, **I am the light of the world.**

In this passage, the phrase, "I am" has an OT connection
back to the story in Exodus about Moses and the burning bush.
When Moses asks God who he should say is sending him to Pharaoh,
the Lord God answers, "Tell them **I am** sent you",
and all through Scripture, "I am" is one of the names of God.

By that **I am** statement Jesus claiming his divinity as the Son of God.
The Gospel of John is structured around 7 **I am** statements
which are then explained through a miracle, such as:

"I am the resurrection and life" (Jn. 11)
and then Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Or **"I am the bread of life"** (Jn. 6)
then he miraculously feeds the crowd of 5000.

In this passage Jesus says, **"I am the light of the world"**
and then he gives sight to a man who had always been blind.

It is significant that **Jesus initiates** the blind man being healed,
just as God loves us and heals us **while we are yet sinners**,
and through Christ redeems and restores us
to the children of God we were created to be.

So how do you or I qualify or prove our worthiness for healing grace?
**The message is, we don't qualify -- it's all entirely God's grace,
which we don't initiate, but simply receive and respond.**

So how does Jesus actually accomplish that healing miracle,
of restoring this blind man to who he was created to be? vs. 6b
"... he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes."

Spit from his mouth was mixed with dirt, dust of the ground,
to heal and open the blind man's eyes,
so that he could see and receive the light.

Making mud, by mixing dust and saliva, Jesus healed the blind man.

But there is much more to this than just medicinal mud and spit.
There is a subtle connection to the Creation story itself, *Genesis 2:7*
... then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground...

By using the original building materials of the Creation story,
this passage points back theologically to earlier in John vs. 1:2-4
He (Jesus) was in the beginning with God. **All things came into being** through him, and without him not one thing
came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was **the light of all people.**

Just as Adam was created from the dust of the ground,
so too Jesus makes mud from the dust and saliva to open his eyes.
**In a poetic, symbolic and metaphorical sense
Jesus is re-creating new eyes that can see the true Light,
illustrating that as Creator, he is the light of the world.**

This story about healing the blind man is told as a parable,
intended to reveal who Jesus is & what he came to accomplish.

Just as Jesus healed the blind man so that he could now see light,
so Jesus heals us by grace, by opening our eyes to see the light,
making visible the true light of God's gracious purpose & call.

Another important detail of this miracle story,
is that Jesus sent the blind man to wash at the pool of Siloam,
and that he returned, no longer blind but is now able to see.

The blind man had to respond, believe and trust Jesus enough to obey.

The invitation to be healed, to see the Light was all grace,
but it also **required some response**, to accept it or reject it.
The question was, would he believe, would he trust and obey,
would he choose to respond to the healing grace that Jesus offered?

He chooses to obey, he is healed and now he can see!
As in *Amazing Grace*, "I once was blind, but now I see."

Next scene, his neighbors, representing the world are skeptical
and challenge his testimony concerning this change in his life.
They question the miraculous by saying it wasn't really him,
and then demand some other explanation for how it was done...
... but he insists, **I believed, I trusted, I obeyed, and now I can see!**

Then the religious folks get involved and it gets more complicated,
as then his healing claims are challenged by the Pharisees, twice,
because his story did not fit their religious certainties. vs. 16

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man (Jesus) 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.

Sometimes we can be
so certain of our assumptions and our own understanding,
that we limit the light of God's grace, truth and love,
and refuse to let that light shine into our darkness.

In John's Gospel in particular, sin is not defined
as being the particular wrong things we do and say,
but is defined as refusing to believe, to trust and obey,
thereby rejecting the grace being offered in Jesus Christ,
which is choosing to remain in the darkness
rather than by grace, coming into the light.

One of the ways that sometimes we choose the darkness,
is by clinging so tightly to our own rigid expectations,
that we do not allow for even the possibility
that God might be up to something new or different,
or that a Scripture passage might be saying more,
or something different than we always assumed.

The question really is, **what does God want and require from us?**
The Pharisees believed with rigid certainty that it's
to follow all the religious rules, rituals traditions.

In contrast, the message of grace from Jesus, as emphasized in John,
is all about faith --- calling us to believe, to trust and obey.
And because Jesus is Lord, we strive to love God & love our neighbor.

So the way we live as characterized by grace, compassion & goodness,
serves as a reflection of God's presence, mercy and graciousness,
and of God's justice and mercy, as we walk in faith with God.

But the Pharisees willfully chose to reject, deny and oppose Jesus
because they object to the miracle being done on the Sabbath,
and so refuse to see this miracle that points toward God. vs. 16
Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath."

And the second time the Pharisees challenged the man's testimony,
he simply describes what happened to him, his experience, vs. 25

He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that **though I was blind, now I see.**"

As the Light of the world, Jesus triumphs over the forces of darkness, saving, those who respond in faith from their spiritual blindness.

The problem of the Pharisees was not a lack of information.
They knew that the blind man had received his sight,
and there are at least a dozen Old Testament passages
that specifically mention that a sign of the Messiah
will be that he will bring healing sight to the blind.

A good example of that is the Isaiah passage we read, vs. 1, 7

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations... **to open the eyes that are blind, ... those who sit in darkness.**

That same pattern was fulfilled by the life and ministry of Jesus.

But since this miraculous healing and the way Jesus did it
did not fit into the religious system of the Pharisees,
they rejected and denied it, and were opposed it
as a willful refusal, choosing not to see & believe.

The point is that Jesus is God, and he is our Creator and Redeemer,
who came to restore this broken creation that has gone blind,
but this world has chosen to reject, and refuses to see.

The position of many in our world and culture
is that Jesus was a great teacher, a wise sage or philosopher,
perhaps a miracle worker who taught peace and non-violence,
but the Gospel of John does not allow for that possibility.

Either Jesus was God as he claimed to be, or he was a crazy liar.
According to John's gospel we have only two possible options,
either we accept, believe and trust the claims of Jesus,
or choose to reject and remain in spiritual darkness.

As we read in our meditation in preparation today, John 3:19-20

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, but the people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light...

In the gospel of John,
it is deliberate and definitive choice, light or darkness
because Jesus does not leave a middle ground for indecision.

The passage from John we've looked at today comes as a warning,
that we too can be blind to the evidence and truth of God's Light
and miss seeing God's revelation and grace happening in our midst,
for God works in mysterious ways in our lives & world,
far beyond what we expect or what we can understand.

The boundaries of faith that we would place around God's love,
the assumptions we would make that set limits on God's grace,
can plunge us too into spiritual darkness and blindness.

The Pharisees had it figured out, they were sure, but they were wrong.
We too can be sure --- and we too can be wrong.

The light of Jesus is promise and hope, **the Creator re-creating**,
and the assurance of God breaking in with the impossible
by bringing new possibilities for peace, joy and wonder,
that can conquer even the darkness of a broken human life.

Lent can be about recognizing our own blindness & dark-hidden places
and by choosing to let the Holy Spirit reveal the Presence of Jesus,
we can let that power of grace grow, heal and transform us
and give us a fresh insight of renewed spiritual vision.

**Our call is to a refreshed awareness of God, God's grace and promise,
of God's presence, power and activity in our lives and in the world,
so that we celebrate our Lord's faithfulness a lot more,
and live out a deeper sense of gratitude, joy and hope.**

Lent urges us to open our eyes and lives to a new vision of opportunity
and not to lose sight of God's promises, of what matters most,

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:3-5)