

SCRIPTURE READING FOR MARCH 19, 2023 @ CAPC OAKLAND

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

John is the fourth of the four gospels in the Second Testament. The gospels are the telling of the story of the life of Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings. John is most likely the last of the four to be written down as it contains a more developed theological content, and heavy use of metaphor. This story of the blind man who see and the seeing who are blind told only by John.

I am the light of the world:: One of the unique aspects of the gospel of John is that it contains “I am” statements by Jesus. In Hebrew the most holy name for God YHWH is a derivative of the expression “I am”. The “I am” statements found in the Gospel of John are the bread of life (6:35), the light of the world (8:12; 9:5), the door (10:7), the good shepherd (10:11, 14), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way the truth and the life (14:6) and the true vine (15:1).

able to see:: In the Greek for this scripture, anytime Jesus describes the blind man’s sight, the word βλέπω | *blepo* is used, which means to see, perceive, or discern. This word “suggests seeing something physical, with spiritual results (perception). That is, it carries what is seen into the non-physical (immaterial) realm so a person can take the needed action (respond, beware, be alert).” In other words, Jesus uses a word that implies something much deeper than physical sight—it connotes perception and wisdom. In contrast, in John 9:8, the Greek word used for “SEEN” is θεάομαι | *theaomai*, which means to look at or to gaze upon, which connotes that one is a spectator. This word, therefore, can imply that the blind man is under the gaze of his neighbors who only see him as the town beggar. Compare these different types of seeing and the deeper meaning within these words. What do these words imply about power dynamics? How does the Greek give you a fuller understanding of the type of sight the blind man receives?

it was a Sabbath day when Jesus:: The sabbath was intended to be a holy day of rest, worship and reflection. Work was forbidden as per the 4th commandment. Leviticus 23:3; Exodus 20:8-11. Much work had been done to delineate between work and what wasn’t considered work. Here we see that healing – making the mud – were considered by the Pharisees to be work. So, while the healing was miraculous, doing it on the Sabbath was considered a sin.

John 9:1-41
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

¹ As [Jesus] walked 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 Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ 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, ⁷ saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back *able to see*. ⁸ 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?” ⁹ Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.” ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ 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.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now *it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes*. ¹⁵ 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*.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “*This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.*” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such **SIGNS**?” And they were divided. ¹⁷ 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.”

¹⁸ The Jews 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 ¹⁹ and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰ His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, ²¹ 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.”²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.²³ Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ 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.”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.”²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”²⁷ He answered them, “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?”²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.”³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, “Do you believe in THE SON OF MAN?”³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.”⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- A commentator on the text encourages us to first name the ableist notion that “blindness” is an inherent deficiency. Metaphors using blindness are built on the idea that this physical state of being is somehow “less than” and, regardless of the cause, is in all cases a problem, malady, and affliction that must be solved, healed, and fixed. The culture of Jesus’ time did not think any differently, thus the many examples of physical limitation being the stand-in for sin and brokenness. Curiously no one in the story asks the man how he is, or how they can help. Rather they are focused on who did what, or what happened to make him blind, “less than” everyone else. When have you asked the wrong questions in a situation, missing what God might have had in store for you?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be or change through this word of scripture?

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

SIGNS :: In the other three gospels what we would call miracles are called “miracles” or “works of power.” In the gospel of John, they’re called “signs” – possibly teasing out the reality that the point to more than just what they are as signs of what God is up to in Jesus.

the Jews :: the story is told with what we might consider an antisemitic flavor. Here the expression *the Jews* is referring to the religious leadership, not the whole people. By the time that the gospel is written (after 70 CE) the followers of Jesus have been expelled from participation in the life of the synagogue and temple. They’ve been cut off from the Jewish people – a sense of bitterness and division experienced then seeps into the language with which this story (and the gospel) are told.

THE SON OF MAN :: Jesus often uses this title, more than Messiah, to refer to himself. It comes from the book of Daniel 7:13-14 - “¹³ As I [Daniel] watched in the night visions, I saw one LIKE A SON OF MAN coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.¹⁴ To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.”