

Church of the Crossroads  
Fourth Sunday in Lent  
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Neal MacPherson

## SEEING THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH

Psalm 23  
John Chapter 9

We just heard yet another well-crafted story from the Gospel of John, this one about a man born blind who receives his sight. It is a story that revolves around a sharp contrast. The blind man's act of believing in Jesus is contrasted with the rejection of Jesus by the Pharisees.

Although the story is a creation by the Gospel writer, a historical reality informs the story. Towards the close of the first century CE, around the time the Fourth Gospel was written, a permanent separation occurred between the early Christian community and the Jewish community. Christians were thrown out of the Jewish synagogues where they had been worshipping. The story reflects the separation. The blind man, in confessing Jesus to be the Messiah, had to leave the synagogue. His parents are afraid to speak, lest they suffer the same fate.

It was not only that the blind man believed in Jesus; it is also that he, a person whom the religious law deemed to be less than pure because he had been born blind, had the audacity to teach the Pharisees a thing or two. Notice the touch of humor in the reporting of the conversation.

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." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 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? Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he

comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but God does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.  
John 9:24–32

The man who was formerly blind now teaches the teachers! How astonishing, indeed. We begin to see what is going on in the story. The Pharisees are stuck in their conventional religious understanding, which tells them that a man who heals on the Sabbath must be a sinner and that sinners are incapable of performing miracles. Therefore the sinner named Jesus simply could not have given the blind man his sight. By contrast, the blind man, having received his sight, embarks on a journey from sight to insight, from astonishment to belief. He begins to see through the eyes of faith. First, he sees Jesus as a healer who gave him his sight. Then, he sees Jesus as a prophet. Finally, he sees Jesus as the Son of Man, that is, the Messiah. This insight into who Jesus is leads him to believe in Jesus.

Let us remember that in the Gospel of John, belief is not to be equated with intellectual assent. Sandra Schneiders states that in John's Gospel, belief

. . . is the fundamental openness of heart, the basic readiness to see and hear what is really there, the fidelity to one's experience no matter how frightening or costly it appears to me, the devotion to being that refuses to tamper with reality in order to preserve the situation with which one is familiar. This basic disposition to accept the truth is what enables the person, regardless of moral weakness and lapse, regardless of ethnic or religious background, regardless of orthodoxy, regardless of religious education or lack thereof, to be interiorly "taught by God."<sup>1</sup>

This describes the man who received his sight. Through an openness of heart and a readiness to see and hear what is really there, he comes to believe in Jesus. And his believing in Jesus leads him to commit himself to God, for in his experience (and this is reinforced over and over again in the

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 88.

Gospel of John itself), Jesus and God are one. In John's Gospel the only absolute commitment is the commitment to God, which for the Christian means commitment to Jesus.

This story, then, is really a story about a commitment that comes about through believing. The Pharisees are committed to law, temple, scripture, Sabbath, hierarchy, and tradition (I do believe the same Pharisaic spirit is alive and well today, and if we are honest, is to be found in all of us.) These commitments, in the view of John's Gospel, had replaced their commitment to God. The blind man who received his sight set aside all these commitments and returned to a basic commitment to God, which was synonymous with his believing in Jesus.

This gives the blind man insight, the ability, through an openness of heart, to see and hear what was really there, to rely on his own experience no matter how frightening or costly it must have appeared to have been. From this time forth, his commitment to God will shape the way he sees himself and his world.

I am now going to go beyond our story to say something about our commitment to God, which in the context of the Fourth Gospel means a commitment to Jesus. That commitment, which for us needs to be our primary commitment, will give us a capacity to confront all other allegiances and commitments. It will allow us to see and hear what is really there in the world, and then to speak the truth as we understand it.

Recently, I have come to realize that we Christians have a unique perspective on the world, which is derived from this basic commitment to God, whom we see revealed in Jesus. From this perspective, we are able to say and affirm truths that are rarely said and affirmed in the public arena.

I know that many of us are placing great hopes in this year's presidential election, but there are some things that no leading candidate, Republican or Democrat, can say, or should I say "dare" say. Let me name two. Have you heard any of the three leading presidential candidates say anything against the basic premise of our market economy—namely, that everything will work out economically if we just allow the market place to work its magic? That premise makes the market into a "god" and overlooks the great harm that is being done in our world through unfettered and unregulated economic activity. For one thing, it prevents our leading

candidates to entertain even the possibility of instituting universal health care based upon a single payer system, something that has been accomplished by the vast majority of nations in the industrial world. Secondly, have you heard any of the three leading presidential candidates say that the downturn in the nation's economic growth may actually be good for the environment? Less growth means that less of the earth's resources are plundered. So, let's not worry. We cannot do anything about the economy anyway. But the fact that we may be facing economic hardship may set the creation to singing!

Now, how can we say these things? Simply because our primary commitment is to God, and that basic commitment frees us up to view all other commitments as secondary, to set aside all ideologies, whether political or economic, to see the world as it really is. We are able to speak the truth.

In the face of the uncertain economy, and the fear it engenders in human beings who probably have too much to begin with, we are able to say

The Lord is my shepherd;  
 I shall not want.  
 He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
 He leads me beside still waters;  
 He restores my soul.

All other commitments, other than our commitment to God, are secondary. This even includes our commitment to Church of the Crossroads! It's not that our other commitments are unimportant, especially our commitment to our human relationships, it's just that these commitments are important because our primary commitment is to God as we have come to know God in Jesus.

Our commitment to God enables us to live joyously, freely, responsibly, and fearlessly in this world. That joyous, free and fearless spirit we see in the man born blind who was healed by Jesus. He came to see through the eyes of faith, and that set him free to open his heart and see and hear what was really there. He was led to place his commitment in God through his belief in Jesus, and that set him free the human being he was created to be. May it also be so for us.

