

**“I’m so Pretty!”**  
A Sermon for Every Sunday, Lent 4A  
*John 9:1-41*

Her name is Maria. She was born many weeks premature in a small village in Eastern Europe. She was blind from birth.

At the age of 15, she came to the United States, where a talented surgeon determined that one of her eyes could possibly work if Maria received a corneal transplant.

A donor was located. The surgery was done.

And at the age of 15, having lived her whole life in the darkness of blindness, the doctors sat Maria in front of a mirror, and slowly removed the bandages from her eye.

Thanks to a video taken from over her right shoulder, we are privileged to watch the look on her face as slowly, for the first time in her life, she begins to see.

She looks at herself in the mirror. Her face fills with astonishment. She’s never seen *anything*, and now she can see *herself!*

She squeals in absolute delight, “I’m so pretty!”

Thanks to the marvels of a smartphone video on YouTube, we are privileged to be witnesses to miracles. Miracle moments are now posted on Facebook. And we can see them.

Sadly, we cannot see the miracle moment in today’s Gospel passage. But we can *imagine* it.

The Gospel of John tells us about a man who was born blind. Like 15 year old Maria, this man had apparently never seen a thing. He lived in darkness, and begged for his daily bread.

Like so many of us today, the people in Jesus’ time tried to figure out: why do bad things happen to people? Why does illness happen? Why do people suffer?

One answer they found in the Old Testament was rather simple – if someone suffers from a physical illness or deformity, it is – most likely - a punishment for sin.

*This* man in John’s Gospel was blind from birth – so people concluded that either HE was a sinner, or his PARENTS were sinners. The blindness must be a punishment for sin. The *whole family* lived with the darkness of *shame*.

Jesus notices the blind man’s suffering. Jesus smears clay on his eyes – perhaps recalling how God created man and woman out of clay back in the Book of Genesis.

Jesus is creating, recreating, giving this man and his family a chance for a new beginning.

Then Jesus says to the man, “Go and wash.” The man departs. And this is where I wish we had a smart phone!

What happened when he washed in the waters of the pool? Was there lightening, or an angel choir, or some other sound or sign from heaven?

Or was this a quiet miracle, like so many miracles that happen around us each day without our noticing.

And what was the look on his face when, for the first time in his life, this man could see? How did he respond when he saw the glint of sunlight off a ripple in the water? How strange the world must look when you’re seeing it for the first time.

Imagine being 35 years old, and seeing a tree for the first time, or a cloud. Imagine seeing your mother’s face for the first time. Up to this point, you’ve only known her by the sound of her voice and the smell of her skin and hair.

Imagine walking back from the pool, and for the first time you see a horse, or a snake, or an infant.

And, while mirrors were scarce at the time of Jesus, did this man see his reflection in the water? What did he think of his own face?

He had lived his whole life - blind. What was he thinking, what he was feeling, as he saw everything for the first time? How would YOU feel?

And remember – he was healed by Jesus, but up to this point he’s never seen Jesus. He *spoke* with Jesus, but he hadn’t seen him.

Now Jesus – who is God’s love in the flesh - was gone. In other words, this man had been healed by a God he could not see. (aren’t WE healed by a God WE cannot see?)

After the surgery, when Maria looked at herself in the mirror for the first time, she squealed, “I’m so pretty!”

The man in the Gospel sees the world for the first time. He joyfully tells people how he’s been healed, and by whom. And what does everyone tell him?

*You’re ugly.*

To be fair, they don’t use that exact word in the Gospel. But isn’t that the message they send him by their words and actions?

He’s just been healed, and almost immediately they drag him before a religious tribunal. They hurl angry, fear-filled words at him: “Who is the man who healed you? Where is he now? Why

did he heal you on the Sabbath? The man who healed you is a sinner! And you are too!”

Finally, they say to the newly- healed man, “Get out. You’re filled with sin.” They cannot allow him to be in their midst.

They’ve sent a clear message to the man and his parents -“you’re ugly.”

Sadly, churches, synagogues, and faith communities, have a consistent track record of telling people that they are not welcome, or loveable. But Jesus, the light of the world, goes and finds the man that the religious leaders had discarded.

And Jesus, the light of the world, helps this man to *see everything clearly*. Not just on a physical level, but in *every* way.

Jesus helps this man to see that he is deeply loved by the God who created him.

Jesus helps this man to see that God the Father does not want him to live with shame and guilt.

Jesus helps this man to see that his parents are beloved by God.

Jesus helps this man to see that the darkness of his past life cannot control his present or his future.

Jesus helps this man to see that no darkness – not sin, not guilt, not fear, nor the darkness of confusion or anger... NO DARKNESS is stronger than Jesus’ light.

And Jesus helps him to see – that even when everyone else is casting him aside and telling him that he is not worthy or welcome, God’s response is staring him in the face: “you are deeply loved, and you are child of God, created in God’s image.”

This – and so much more - is what Jesus helps this man to see. And this is what Jesus wants US to see.

The world in which we live has darkness in it. And it can be difficult for us to see where the light, or hope, or God can be found.

People get sick. Depression weighs us down. Joblessness happens. Economic stress.

Darkness. People are angry, or scared. Old hatreds flare up. A country gets invaded. A terrible earthquake happens.

A marriage falls apart. Political leaders get better at lying.

The darkness of human brokenness sometimes tries to hide the truth. But the truth can’t stay hidden.

Racism is real. Christians face death simply for being Christian. Children’s lives are literally cut

short, and we call it a 'choice.' At other times, we choose not to see the dignity of our neighbor, because they are 'illegals.'

Injustice seems so strong. And Satan whispers in our ears, "See, there is no hope... And God is not helping... and you are never going to be better.'

Darkness. Then along comes a Jesus we can't see quite yet, and he declares, "Go and wash." Wash... in the waters of baptism, jump into the pool of the Lord's love, splash around in the waves of his mercy.

Then you will see. You will see yourself as God sees. And you will see each other as God sees. And you will see the world as God sees. And you will see your future full of hope, as God sees.

In our gathering together, in or hearing of the Word, in our sharing a holy communion on this Sunday of Lent, we encounter the life-giving, healing presence of Christ, who washes away our darkness, and bathes us in the light of his love.

—*Michael Renninger* © 2023