

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Lent, March 26, 2023  
John 9:1-41

## Light to See

I almost always love light. In fact, the more light the better. One of my pet peeves is not having enough light, especially to read by. (And of course, this has absolutely nothing to do with my aging eyes/eyesight. Wink wink.) [So I'm grateful to the Stewardship Committee here at church for the new row of LEDs they put up recently; now I can finally read my words, and my musical notes.] One of my primary quests as a relatively new homeowner is to find the brightest [and best] light bulb. I'm still looking.

And speaking of looking, another time when I would say "the more light the better" is when I am looking for something. Something I dropped on the floor maybe, or the back yard, or that might be "hiding" under our couch or bed. And so, another of my quests is to find the best and brightest flashlight. [Show one?] If any of you have recommendations I'd love to hear them.

But if I'm honest, there are also times when I don't love light. Like when I'm trying to sleep, for example. At such times, I would even say the less light the better. Sure is a good thing God gave us both day and night, right?

In my last two sermons, I've been pointing out how in the Gospel of John, certain words often have more than one meaning. And that is certainly the case here. Words like "light." And "sight." And for those of us that like words to rhyme, I can add "night."

So when Jesus says in verse 5, "I am the light of the world," what is he really saying? And do we want the light that he offers? Is the statement "the more light the better" true in this case? Is Jesus the best light bulb or flashlight we can find?

Imagining being blind from birth. The man in this story didn't know what he was missing. All he knew was that his life consisted of sitting by the roadside each day and begging. That wouldn't be much of a life, would it?

Now imagine being given eyesight for the very first time. A whole new world will have opened up. There's a whole new reality to explore. A whole new realm of beauty. Like a sunrise—can you imagine seeing your first ever sunrise? Or the moon and the stars at night? (Another time when we would say the less light the better.)

The problem for the Pharisees was, if this man's healing happened on the sabbath, if someone had made mud out of dirt and spittle (gross, right?) and put it on the man's eyes—on the sabbath—then that constituted work. Which meant that it was a sin. And that whoever did it was a sinner.

Now sin is a problem, no question about it. Doing things God doesn't want us to do is a problem. Just as not doing things God wants us to do is a problem. I mean, I sin every day. And I imagine you do to. (Especially you high-schoolers! I'm kidding! ☺) And so it is so important that we take time every day to acknowledge our sins (like we did earlier in the service this morning), to say we are sorry, and then to ask for the forgiveness that God so graciously gives.

The problem is, we tend to get confused about what sin really is. Or to put it differently, we get hung up with sin, with wanting to know what is sin, and what isn't. And similarly, who is

a sinner and who isn't. Oh yes. We especially love to label others as sinners. I mean, if we're honest, don't we all love to do that?

Can you believe that people actually thought blindness was caused by sin? That makes things easy, right? Easy to say things like "Hey, there's a blind man over there; he must be a sinner." And then we add, with self-righteous smugness, "Sure glad I'm not blind!" And while we're at it, let's make a list of all the other disabilities (or even just differences) that we like to label as sinful. You know, so we can feel better about ourselves.

But the fact is, and what we don't want to admit, is that we're all blind in some ways. We all have insufficient [bad] eyesight. The good news is that there is a great eye doctor in town, in fact the best eye doctor I've ever found. And his name is Jesus. You've heard of him, right? If not, you should definitely check him out. He's guaranteed to help your eyesight improve.

The bad news is that we're not always going to like what he says. Sometimes he's going to make us uncomfortable. Or even mad. Just like he made those Pharisees mad. Especially at the very end of this story, when they said indignantly to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" (The way the Greek reads, they were clearly expecting "no" for an answer). And Jesus responds to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains." In other words, pointing out the sins of others, while meanwhile you ignore (or worse, deny) your own, is one of the worst sins there is. And an even greater sin, in fact one of the greatest, is to cast someone out of the synagogue. (Or in our case, the church.) No wonder the parents of the blind man were so afraid of the Pharisees. And no surprise that after they had cast the man out, Jesus specifically sought him out. Did we all catch that?

But that's one of the things about Jesus. His light is so bright that it forces us to see our own sins. And we don't like that. Oh no--that makes us uncomfortable. That light is too bright! There are times when we would just rather our sleep remain undisturbed.

Jesus is the best and brightest light bulb in town. But are we really sure that is what we want?

Fortunately, he is also the best eye doctor in town. And if you're really ready to pay the price (and it is expensive having him as your eye doctor), it will be the best money you have ever spent.

Please pray with me. Lord Jesus, Light of the world, help us to see the way you see.  
Amen.