

St. Andrew Evangelical Lutheran Church
Rev. Christopher Raiford, Pastor
" A Matter of Perspective " John 9:1-41
Sunday March 22, 2020 – 4th Sunday in Lent

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

Spring officially began last Friday for everyone in the United States. Do you remember Friday here? It was pretty nice with sunshine and mid 70s for highs. From your perspective it probably felt a lot like spring. Today we're struggling to get to the mid-50s with clouds. Now your perspective has changed, and it seems like we're back waiting for spring again. If you were in Kiel Wisconsin (Wendi's hometown) on Friday you'd have been clearing freshly fallen snow. In northern Wisconsin the snow and ice are still there as far as you can see. Minneapolis still has a foot of snow on the ground. North Dakota is still dealing with temperatures in the teens each night. They're all asking, 'what spring?' It's a matter of perspective.

The man Jesus encountered had been blind from birth. His parents along with those who saw him begging knew that he was blind. He recognized his blindness. Jesus and his disciples knew he was blind too. The disciples then asked the next question. Why? They wanted perspective on what caused the blindness. **"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"** It had to be some terrible sin. All the disciples wanted was to gain some perspective to help them not suffer something as bad as blindness for sins they committed. The disciples held the popular perspective of many, suffering like blindness was due to some sin.

This blind man's encounter with Jesus changed everything. **"either this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."** Gain some perspective disciples. Not all suffering is because of some particular sin. Not all suffering is because of being blamed by God for someone else's sins. Sometimes bad things happened and hardships had to be endured simply because God had an even greater purpose. Jesus would work with this man's physical suffering and help everyone gain new perspective, God's perspective.

None of us remember the first time we were able to see. Can you imagine what that would be like? **"The man went and washed, and came home seeing."** This wasn't like going from an old school black and white TV to color TV. He had never seen colors at all. Never saw his parents. Imagine seeing the face behind all those "I love you's" growing up. He only knew his parents by feel and listening. Now he saw them, saw their features, their smile when they looked at him. Even as he took in all the sights around him at home he probably never forgot the man who put the mud on his eyes. That man gave him something amazing, physically gave him a change of perspective.

Not surprising some doubted. A man blind his whole life suddenly sees. That doesn't happen every day. Skepticism is natural. But to question whether or not he had ever been blind or to point the accusing finger and say the man lied that level of doubt might be surprising. The Pharisees were the main opposition, wondering how Jesus could pick the Sabbath day to heal. **"This man is not from God for he does not keep the Sabbath."** The rules said no work could be done on that day. The Pharisees appreciated the rules because they helped people stay close with God. They were the keepers of the rules. They knew the Bible and they told the people how to get right with God. Keep the Sabbath, do the sacrifices, and obey. It was constant work. When Jesus, a so-called religious person, violated the Sabbath rules it shocked them. Others were shocked that a sinner like Jesus could do miracles. **"How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?"** The Pharisees never understood mercy; they were all about good works getting someone in good with God. They didn't have God's perspective.

Without God's perspective the Pharisees spent a lot of time evaluating other people and not so much time evaluating themselves. They bought into the notion, like the disciples, that people suffered when they did something bad against God. So in their eyes the blind man had the problem, not them. He was blind, not them. What they didn't see and were really blind to, was that all their studying, power, and rules in order to please God were blindness of another kind. They weren't physically blind; they easily saw sin in other people. But because they were quick to deny sin in themselves, they were spiritually blind.

So there was blindness of two kinds in people that needed curing, physical blindness and spiritual blindness. Both needed God's perspective. The blind man wasn't blind because of a particular sin, but he was sinful. The Pharisees were still blind to the reality of their sinfulness. Both were spiritual blindness, in their hearts full of sin neither could get right with God. Anyone who takes the same perspective lacks God's perspective. A heavy insistence on rule following in order to make God pleased is spiritual blindness. Living a moral life, doing the right thing most of the time, and saying the right things all to make God satisfied is spiritual blindness. Being ignorant towards God is spiritual blindness. Seeing someone else's sin but not their own is spiritual blindness.

This isn't a story about physical blindness in us. And we aren't spiritually blind either. We know Jesus, we're here this morning, we know what the Bible says. So, what's the danger for us? Might it be worry? Worry about our physical wellbeing pulls our focus to trying to heal our bodies. It might be a cold that lingers or a more serious disease we have to spend time researching

and treating. The danger is when that causes us to lose perspective. To think this life is all that's important and keeping ourselves alive longer becomes our only goal is dangerous. Before you know it you could've completely forgotten your spiritual wellbeing.

Another danger comes when we try and equate physical problems with something we've done. I'm not well off financially because God knows and is punishing me for mishandling money earlier in life. I have this disease because of this particular sin. Our suffering is equated with some sin from our past. Maybe we look at someone else and wonder what they did to get the kind of life they have, good or bad. Maybe we blame someone else for our bad fortunes. Or we struggle in seeing ourselves as sinful wrongdoers. Careful of those thoughts. Careful that we see ourselves from God's perspective. We're sinful. We've done wrong. The fault is in us. If that's our thinking it's spiritual blindness.

This formerly blind man would've listened to or done anything Jesus said. Jesus was going to teach him to see God's perspective. He had to learn to see. **"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"** Jesus came after this blind man who could now see so that he could learn to really see, see spiritually God's perspective. The blind man was waiting like most for the Son of Man to come. The Son of Man was the promised Messiah, someone God would send to save people. The blind man may have thought the coming Messiah was a healer, a teacher, or just a great man. More than that, Jesus pointed out that this man was now seeing him physically with his own eyes. Jesus was the Messiah. But more than just physical seeing, this formerly blind man needed to spiritually see. **"You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."** Jesus directed his attention to the proclaimed Word. That was God's perspective. Jesus' proclamation of the Word taught this man spiritual sight.

Physical sight doesn't help anyone see Jesus as the Savior. The Pharisees saw Jesus and still didn't believe in him. They didn't recognize their spiritual blindness because of sin. They refused to see themselves in need of what Jesus was giving, forgiveness and love. They were blind but didn't recognize it. They would stay that way. Instead of physical seeing it was spiritual seeing that Jesus was after. Recognizing the spiritual blindness and a need for a sight from God's Word Jesus gives God's perspective to see spiritually.

While you were born spiritually blind, God's Word and the proclamation of Christ led you to God's perspective. God taught you to see spiritually. To look and see a Savior who is true God come to this world so that he might carry your sins. To look and see Jesus preparing himself for battle against Satan and all evil. To look and see the Son of Man opening eyes and hearts to see him by faith through an understanding of his love. Jesus teaches us to see that the Bible talks about him. There any worry about physical problems melts away as we see Jesus pay for our sins and become someone we can trust. There we realize suffering

isn't punishment for something we've done. Suffering and everything that happens to us is necessary and is used by Jesus to lead us from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight.

We're still learning to see each day. Learning to look to Jesus for not only sight but the ability to use that sight for his purposes. We're called to work with Jesus to go into the battle to help others gain God's perspective. That means helping them recognize their spiritual blindness in sin with humility. Then we can point them to Christ Jesus alone as the one who cures spiritual blindness. It's leading them to see, to see with eyes of faith Christ Jesus for forgiveness and life. We can share how God led us from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight. We can share how Jesus rescued us from blindness that only leads to hell so that now we have spiritual sight which leads to heaven.

Spring is coming this year; slower for some more than others. It's all a matter of perspective. Our lives are a matter of perspective too. Jesus said, **"I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."** Only God gives you the right perspective on spiritual blindness. For anyone who claims to be able to see, that is claiming to be without sin, Jesus says they're still blind and it will only get worse. For us who were blind because of sin now Jesus shows us the reality. And in love he gives us sight. You've got God's perspective on spiritual blindness and have been brought to spiritual sight through Christ Jesus.