

Christ the King Lutheran Church – Houston, TX

Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 15, 2026

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

Grace and peace to you, my Christ the King family, on this Fourth Sunday in Lent!

What a story we just heard! What a fascinating story! I could spend hours talking about this text, but Pr. Derr promised last week that, if the Gospel text was long you could sit during the reading AND that the sermon would not be so long, so I'll try to choose simply a few points....

First, the question at the beginning of our story is so human, isn't it? "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" It must have been someone who sinned. It was a widely held conviction that sin and illness or disability are connected as cause and effect. We might scoff at that connection all these years later, but looking for blame is as real today as ever. Something is wrong, something hurts, something is broken – whose fault is it? We still ask it all the time – just with an updated vocabulary. If a business fails, we look for the bad decision. If a kid struggles in school, we blame the parents, or the system, or the teacher, or the screen time. If someone gets sick, we quietly wonder what caused the illness. Even if tragedy strikes – floods, shootings, wars – we rush to assign blame, because uncertainty terrifies us more than guilt.

The disciples see a blind man, and they want a tidy explanation of who or what caused this, BUT Jesus refuses to give them one. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus says, and adds that it happened "so that God's works might be revealed in him." Jesus does not deny the reality of sin in the world, but he refuses to turn suffering into a math equation. Instead, he turns suffering into a place where God goes to work. We're told that the man is blind from birth. He has never seen light, never seen a face, never seen his own reflection. And yet – ironically – he becomes the only one in the whole story who truly sees and believes.

Everyone else thinks they already see! The disciples think they see. The neighbors think they see (although they're not even sure that the man who now sees is actually their neighbor who was blind)! The Pharisees are certain they see. And that certainty – that confidence in their own clarity – is exactly what blinds them. And, that's a caution for us too. We live in an age of strong opinions and instant certainty. Social media rewards outrage, not humility. Algorithms feed us what we already agree with. We're trained to believe that if we just read the right article or follow the right account, we'll finally see clearly.

But Jesus keeps interrupting that illusion. Jesus spits on the ground, bends down and makes mud. Just that kneading process – like kneading dough for bread – was one of the 39 forbidden tasks on the Sabbath (according to the Mishnah), which may in part be why the Pharisees accused Jesus of not observing the Sabbath. On top of that, he spread the mud on the man's eyes. This is not sanitized, spiritualized healing. This is earthy and messy. AND, it also echoes Genesis – God forming humanity from the dust of the ground. In this amazing story, Jesus, the Word made flesh, gets his hands dirty with creation again.

Here's another fascinating part of this story. Did you notice that the man never asked Jesus to be healed? The man didn't first confess his faith in Jesus as his Lord and Savior! He doesn't pray the sinner's prayer. Nothing! The healing is PURE GRACE! It is pure, undeserved lovingkindness! God does not wait for us to see clearly before acting. God acts SO that we may see!

But, that's not the end of the story! Jesus has done this spectacular miracle – amazing grace...was blind, but now I see – so life must have become hunky dory for the man born blind, right? Well, no! Life immediately gets more difficult for the man! Healing doesn't make him popular. Clarity doesn't make him safe. Truth doesn't make him comfortable. His neighbors argue about whether he's even the same person. The Pharisees interrogate him like a criminal. Even his parents throw him under the bus to protect themselves.

But, by God's grace, he gains strength, and his confession of faith grows. At first, he says simply when asked, "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." BUT, after the endless questioning, he had become a preacher who confronts: "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he [Jesus] comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he 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. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." Whew! The gospel writer John says they couldn't stand it. "They drove him out." They couldn't handle the testimony. The Greek word we translate as "drove out" is ἐκβάλλω, literally to "throw out" – like a Nolan Ryan fastball. They threw out the recipient of God's amazing grace!

There's so much more in this story today, but the time is short. Let's close with what it means for us. Remember that these amazing stories from the Gospel of John which are our Gospel texts this year in Lent are catechetical, chosen by the early Christian Church to instruct us. All the stories of John are about believing. Today's story is about how we see – or don't see -- and believe.

How do we see and believe? How can we "walk as children of light" as Ephesians implores?

I don't know about you, but I have become one who drives by GPS, Google to be specific. I call the patient voice, "Googly." I use Googly everywhere, whether I'm driving in Houston, or waiting for a bus in Istanbul or taking the subway in New York or Rome. I listen to the voice and follow the directions. I trust the voice, even when she takes me down a road I'd never choose myself or have never taken before. Sometimes it feels wrong. Sometimes it looks inefficient. But, I've learned that Googly is almost always right. She can see traffic snarls and construction congestion ahead that I can't see, and I trust her because she knows and sees what I can't – traffic, closures, distance, a late bus.

All our metaphors come up short somewhere, but do you hear what I'm suggesting? Faith is not figuring it all out ourselves. Faith is trusting the voice of Jesus. The Pharisees had it all figured out – their code of conduct on the Sabbath – but the man born blind trusted the voice of Jesus. And that made all the difference. He received the gift of seeing and believing!

Think about how medical imaging works today. An MRI or CT scan doesn't heal you, but it reveals what's actually going on inside. It exposes what we can't see on our own. Stories like today's gospel do something similar. They expose our blindness – not to shame us – but to heal us. Our blindness can insist it has no need of healing, but then we do not see and do not believe. Lent invites us to let that false sight be taken away, to admit where we don't see clearly, to confess our need, to stop pretending we're fine, and THEN to receive sight as sheer gift. Amen.

Pastor David A. Roschke, guest preacher