

John 9
*Seeking: What do you see?*ⁱ
 Fourth Sunday in Lent ~ March 19, 2023
 The Rev. Dr. Laurie Brubaker Davis

Introduction to the Scripture Drama of John 9

Lent is a time-out kind of time. As the late Lucy Rose, a great professor of preaching and a mom, (one of my mentors) suggested, "Lent pulls up a rocking chair and says, "Here, sit down. Think about what you've done and what's been done to you. Take your time. See if you can eke out meaning from your yesterdays, todays, and tomorrows. And while we rock, Lent tells us stories so we can lay our lives beside them. We are invited to ask. "What is God up to in these ancient stories and in our own?"ⁱⁱ

Rock and remember God's ways. Of all the things that Jesus said and did, why was this story written down in the first place? And how could it be important to us now? Look for the assumptions we may bring to this text. In today's story there are assumptions like, *We know people are poor because...* or *We know people are sick because....* Another one could be: *"We know people are incarcerated because..."* Rock and let God revive your spark of unknowing. Of wonder, and curiosity. Consider how we could see more if we would take the time to ask better questions. ⁱⁱⁱ Rock and reflect.

I have brought out this rocking chair, here on the fourth Sunday in Lent, (22 days in, and 18 to go), and invite each of you to sit down here mentally. Let this chair sustain your weight; relax the muscles in your face, around your eyes and jaw. Lay your life beside today's story and let God speak to you through it. Let's begin by opening up our travel journal, and thumbing back to see and remember where our Lenten journey has taken us already.

Back on Feb. 26, we started out in the wilderness with Jesus and in the Garden of Eden with Eve and Adam, where we considered the challenge of choosing what voice to listen to. Next, we found ourselves in the dark with Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night, and God calling seventy-five-year-old Abram to go. We learned how God calls us to be born again and again throughout our lives as our faith calls us to keep changing, to keep growing spiritually throughout all our days on earth. Then last Sunday was hot and sticky. Remember how we were plunked at Jacob's well in Samaria in the bright heat of the day at high noon, where Jesus asked a Samaritan woman for a drink. And we saw how their conversation led to transformation for for her whole Samaritan village.

Are you starting to see a pattern? Jesus says and does things which shock people and challenges the systems in place. Jesus opens their eyes to what is right in front of them, but they had never seen before. The very assumptions that rule their life, turned upside down.

If you are a person who studies the bulletin carefully to calculate just how far beyond 10:30 AM our service might run each Sunday, you may have noticed that our gospel reading weighs in at a whopping 41 verses, and now you are truly starting to get nervous. This reading is so lengthy we didn't even have room to print it in the bulletin. And you just heard me talk about taking our time, rocking slowly, you may be thinking, "Oh my God, when are we going to get out of here? I'm looking forward to Dan Neumann's Forum on OCD. And I really wanted to check out the labyrinth made of cans that the youth built in Fellowship Hall. Oh well."

I have good news for you. Today's story where Jesus heals a man born blind, preaches itself. Although this story is told in all four gospels, only in John do we get the story told with elaborate commentary, humor and irony. And so, I am going to let this story preach itself today. That's right, today's sermon will conclude at the end of the scripture reading, which you will see, as well as hear. We will have a dramatic reading, by 8 of your FPC friends and me. [

Jesus	Gil Nimm
Disciple	Jan Clouse
Man Born Blind (MBB)	Mark Nelson
Neighbor 1	Roxie Wetterau
Neighbor 2	Tracy Olson
Pharisee A	Don Zais
Pharisee B	Bruce Lautenschlager
Mother of MBB	Dolores Aue
Father of MBB	Jim Aue

In the spirit of our Lenten sermon series, 'Seeking: honest questions for deeper faith' I have a few questions to get us set up. And then I invite you to keep rocking and let God use this story to speak to you, to open your eyes to show you what you need to see.

Here are the questions:

- Have you ever beat yourself up for getting sick? I mean really sick, like having a heart attack, or getting cancer, or a chronic illness for which there is no cure. Wondering what you did wrong to get this kind of sickness. Maybe even feeling like God is punishing you for your sins. That was the basic understanding about disease in Jesus' day. And in some ways, that false and corrosive assumption is still around today. If you are a person still living under that cloud—Jesus has an important insight for you.
- Did you ever let God make a major change in your life and then your own friends and family didn't believe you or accept the new, transformed you? Perhaps you are the family member who is finding your changed, loved one hard to accept.
- Do you expect God to do only things which fit into *your* way of seeing the world? Only things which validate your point of view?
- What blind spots in your life need Jesus' healing touch today?
- Now, widening the circle of our attention for a moment, what about our blind spots as the body of Christ we call FPC? As focused on welcoming the stranger as we are: What

are we missing? What blind spots are holding us back from bearing a fuller witness to the world-changing, assumption-busting good news of Christ's unifying, universal love?

- Looking even wider, what about our national blind spots as the wealthiest, most powerful nation in a broken and hurting world. The very world God so loved and still loves. What is Jesus calling us to see differently to mend and heal our broken people and broken ecosystem?

Just one more final word of caution before we begin. Let's not write off the pharisees too quickly because they come off in this story as the bad guys, or at least as kind of clueless, befuddled. Instead, let them serve as a wake-up call to all of us. A wake-up call to all the ways we are blind to God's love right in front of us. All the ways we prefer to shut Jesus out, look the other way, pretend he isn't there. Even though we love Christ with all our hearts. Maybe because we're either too comfortable or too miserable to trust God and to do the work to make the change.

Friends, Jesus is still here. Ready and waiting to heal us, to help us see ourselves and the world just a little more through God's eyes than we did before. So, now please sit and rock a while. Set aside the grocery you need to pick up at the store on the way home from church; stop obsessing about your March madness bracket for the moment. Let go of your income tax return that still isn't done, or deciding what you will have for lunch. And open the eyes of your heart to see what God has for you right now. Let us see what we see, in this dramatic reading of God's holy word written in the Gospel named John, chapter 9. The story of the man born blind receiving sight.

ⁱ The title and sermon themes for this series, *Seeking: honest questions for deeper faith*. A series created for Lent-Easter Year A, are from A Sanctified Art, LLC.

ⁱⁱ Jana L. Childers & Lucy A. Rose, *The Abingdon Women's Preaching Annual Series 1 Year A* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN, 1998), p. 71.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow commentary on John 9, p. 17 *Sanctified Art Sermon Planning Guide*