

Spiritual Vision | John 9:1- 41; Ephesians 5:8-14 | LUMC | March 19, 2023

Dear church family and friends: Last week we learned that Jesus was welcomed by both the Jewish leaders and the public in the Samaritan woman's city. They asked Jesus to stay with them for two days so they could learn from him. This story of the Samaritan woman resulted in all the people of the town becoming Christians, including the Jewish leaders.

This week, unlike last week, Jesus' miraculous work began to face opposition for many reasons. Jesus decided to heal on the Sabbath and the Jewish leaders were unhappy, even though there was no prohibition in the law for performing acts of mercy such as healing a man born blind. Regardless, this healing provoked the Jewish leaders. They resisted his healing, offering differing views. They said Jesus was demon-possessed, and was not the Son of God. He was foreigner in the city. Perhaps he wasn't even a Jew because his teaching was revising old beliefs and prophecies.

But he was not mocking the Mosaic teachings. Although Jesus faced opposition from the leaders, the common Jews applauded this healing in silence. But they feared to go public because the Jewish leaders had just passed a law excommunicating anyone claimed that Jesus was the Son of God.

This story unfolds in many ways, and it relates to our lives significantly. The man's story was questioned by his neighbors. They did not believe the man healed was one they knew. The neighbors contacted the Jewish leaders to get to the truth.

The pharisees—leaders started to investigate the healed man, then his parents, and then back to the healed man. When Jesus appeared and performed a miracle, it created confusion and awoke the individual conscience along with the entire neighborhood and then the city. Jesus' teaching also caught on in the surrounding areas, informing people of their sins. Some people believed while others' doubts and unbelief unfortunately only increased.

The blind man's neighbors were the first to be baffled, some saying the man with the new sight appeared to be the very one who begged by the roadside. Others said he was a different person. They brought him to the Jewish leaders to arbitrate. Even the leaders were divided as to whether he was healed by an intruder—the person called Jesus, whom they never believed and had branded as a liar. I posit that the Jewish leaders' investigation ended with no conclusive evidence despite having talked to the neighbors, the healed man's parents, and twice with the man himself. The leaders did not want the truth that would assign them blame, they wanted to bury the truth.

The man was not moved by the Jews' leaders description of his healing and the healer, and their doubts about the one who healed him. On his second interrogation, the healed man was annoyed and began to use sarcasm, wondering if the pharisees and the priests wanted to become Jesus' disciples. Notice that this time the healed man was a little unclear about Jesus. He seemed to think that Jesus was a prophet, one sent by God to heal him because only one sent from God could perform such a

miracle. The Jewish leaders wanted to twist the facts by denying Jesus' divinity and relegating his teaching into the realm of Satan.

The truth hurt; it negatively affected the leaders. They became angry and wanted to force the healed man to deny Jesus' ability to heal him or to believe that Jesus was from God. They tried to convince the healed man that Jesus was devil-possessed, that he was a sinner despite his healing power. They were directly telling the man to deny the truth of his healing but the man did make any logic of their argument. He insisted he was healed and he said, "I was blind but now, I can see." The healing was undeniable fact.

The leaders finally excommunicated him, cutting him off from all the religious activities his parents feared they might lose. He was made an outcast and warned not to connect with anyone. What gives me strength is the healed man's conviction. He moved on with conviction. He did not want to deny the truth nor disrespect Jesus and minimize the miracle. Call it courage! He was convinced his accusers were wrong since they wanted him to deny the fact that he was healed by a person sent by God—a prophet! Let me ask you, if you were this man, being pressed between a rock and hard place, what do you do?

What lesson can we learn from this story? I would begin with the basic understanding that Jesus has power to heal any type of deformity, using any resource available. The blind man received his physical vision and his spiritual vision. Jesus is able to provide one or both depending on the need of the individual and the reason for healing. The Jews often taught that an individual or a family's sin caused illness. This case is proof that we can undergo certain types of calamities when God wants to use us to deliver a specific message. Remain focused in asking God to reveal the cause of your suffering and never give up or despair.

How about *our* neighbors? They can be both a blessing and a curse. I present myself to my neighbors as I am and live with my neighbors well and not allow them to minimize the facts about my life. Under the law a neighbor's story is often considered to be credible. But the example we learn here is that neighbors can be a bad source and a nightmare. I am glad I currently have neighbors I trust. I am so sorry and I feel for you if live among unfriendly neighbors. One of my Christian goals is to trust my neighbors until they prove untrustworthy.

Jesus had other encounters with the religious and political leaders in the previous chapters of John's Gospel. Jesus had taught extensively on leadership of every kind, whether in the church or outside. This reading is a caution for those in leadership: they should not twist the truth or promote lies to save face or to keep them in leadership. In this reading Jesus warns strongly about lying.

It scares me to realize that three meetings were called by these leaders to twist the fact:

- They assembled to interview the healed man;
- They assembled a second time to interview his parents;
- And then they met a third time to interrogate the healed man.

In this reading we can see a lot of time and resources were used to twist the truth. But at every turn the truth stood glaring. Yet, these Jewish leaders did not want the truth to win so they agreed on a lie: “Let us say Jesus is demon-possessed, that he dishonors Moses’ teachings, that he is a foreigner who does not understand us (even though they, proud Jews in Jerusalem, knew that Jesus was a Jew from Nazareth), he is from devil, etc.” Surprisingly there were some men among the 70 leaders who differed, and required the healed man to be interrogated for a second time. This narrative encourages leaders to allow the facts of the Gospel to lead them where it goes. I enjoy the truth of the Gospel to guide me, and I pray to remain in the truth of the Gospel. May all who lead, not only in the church but in every facet of life right down to instructing a pet, always be fair and straightforward.

When the healed man met Jesus after being excommunicated, he learned Jesus is the Son of God, and began worshipping him for being God—Emanuel “God with us.” The blind man received his spiritual vision and continued to witness for Christ in words and deeds. His testimony of physical and spiritual vision merged to provide him a whole new identity. He was a believer and missionary to people with both physical and spiritual needs. He reached out to the people to tell a new story—having spiritual healing despite being expelled from the temple. Like the Samaritan woman, this man was a new creation in ‘truth and spirit’. He was unafraid to testify of his healing and his new spiritual life. He was boldly living his faith among both types of people—those who doubted his healing and caused great pain by sending him to the Jewish court, and those who supported him like his parents.

ONCE Christ entered my life, he made me a new creation. He offered me a true message I cannot deny just because some people might be offended by it. This reading is challenging us to stand on the “promises of God,” to live in season and out of season. To be unapologetic when on the side of the truth and the facts are self-evident.

I encourage you to stand on the truth of the Gospel. Being a coward and unable to tell the truth when you know it, makes one’s faith weak in the eyes of Jesus. It also makes non-Christians wonder what to do or say. Let the fact of the Gospel be your testimony. Christ went to the cross to save us and to send us to live in the truth of the Gospel. Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and daily Jesus stands in the gaps of our lives calling us back to the cross, providing both physical and spiritual healing and encouraging us to be spiritually alive. Amen.