

Now that we've heard one story about a blind man receiving his sight this morning, let me share another one with you. As I was preparing this sermon this week, I came across another story about a blind man who received his sight. This story was released on Thursday by the AFP—which is the world's oldest established news agency. The story comes from Dublin, Ireland. The headline reads "Blind Irishman sees with the aid of son's tooth in his eye." Does that get your attention? It did mine. The story reads as follows.

Dateline: DUBLIN - An Irishman blinded by an explosion two years ago has had his sight restored after doctors inserted his son's tooth in his eye, he said on Wednesday. Bob McNichol, 57, from County Mayo in the west of the country, lost his sight in a freak accident when red-hot liquid aluminium exploded at a recycling business in November 2005. "I thought that I was going to be blind for the rest of my life," McNichol told RTE state radio. After doctors in Ireland said there was nothing more they could do, McNichol heard about a miracle operation called Osteo-Odonto-Keratoprosthesis (OOKP) being performed by Dr Christopher Liu at the Sussex Eye Hospital in Brighton in England. The technique, pioneered in Italy in the 1960s, involves creating a support for an artificial cornea from the patient's own tooth and the surrounding bone. The procedure used on McNichol involved his son Robert, 23, donating a tooth, its root and part of the jaw. McNichol's right eye socket was rebuilt, part of the tooth inserted and a lens inserted in a hole drilled in the tooth. The first operation lasted ten hours and the second five hours. "It is pretty heavy going," McNichol said. "There was a 65 percent chance of me getting any sight. Now I have enough sight for me to get around and I can watch television. I have come out from complete darkness to be able to do simple things," McNichol said. End of story.

From what I can tell, the purpose of reporting that news story is to show people around the world that scientific modern medicine has taken another leap forward, to the point where now we can take a tooth (or a tooth from one of our relatives), surgically modify it, put it in our eye socket, and nearly 65 percent of the time, chances are, you're going to be able to see. It's a modern-day medical miracle, and the purpose of reporting this story out of Ireland is so that people everywhere can know that this medical treatment is available, and it just might work for someone who wants to regain their eyesight.

The 9th chapter of John's gospel also tells a story about a blind man who receives his sight, but *this* story from John that we've heard today about *this* particular blind man is told for a much deeper purpose and reason. Sure, it's true that John's gospel wants people to know that Jesus can do miraculous healings. Like

verse 32 says, “Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.” It’s true that John shows that the healing which Jesus has done is a miracle, but the purpose of the story is much deeper than the miracle of the blind man receiving physical sight.

How do I know this story’s purpose is deeper? During the last six weeks of my first semester at seminary at Wartburg, in my Greek Exegetical Readings class, we focused on today’s gospel lesson, John, chapter 9. For 50 minutes, every Tuesday and Thursday, a group of about 16 of us plus our professor gathered together in Tower Room 301 to look at the intricacies of the Greek language in this 9th chapter of John’s Gospel. For eight 50-minute class periods, we plugged away on this story, beginning with verse one, and slowly, we made our way through the Greek grammar that was used and the theological implications that lie within each and every word and phrase. On good days, we made it through 5 verses. By the last day of the semester, we had only made it up to verse 28. If you do the math, on average, we spent 14 minutes and 17 seconds on each verse, talking about the deeper meaning and purpose of each and every word. If we would spend that kind of detail on this entire chapter today, we’d be here for 9 hours, 45 minutes, and 43 seconds. And if we would do that, I know what the look on most of your faces would be. It would be something like this: (head to the side, eyes rolled back, tongue sticking out).

No one needs to see or experience that. So, what are we to do? We can’t stay on the surface of the story, and focus *only* on the miracle of this blind man receiving his sight from Jesus. If we’d just stay on that surface part of the story, we wouldn’t even get wet with God’s Word. Yet at the same time, we can’t dive to great depths and explore every nook and cranny of the story today, because if we’d do that, we’d be overwhelmed and we would drown in all the goodness that this story has to offer. So, to what depth should we try to move to and explore today?

As I kept thinking about that question this week—to what depth of this gospel lesson should we try to move to and explore today—one particular image and expression kept coming to mind. It involves hand motions and sounds, and it looks and sounds like this:

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JESUS
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In my mind, this image and expression describes the major action of what's going on in today's gospel lesson. First of all, you've got Jesus. He's really the center of the action during the first seven verses. Jesus sees the blind man, the disciples ask Jesus about the blind man, Jesus talks about why this man has been blind since birth, and then Jesus goes out of his way to heal this man. And then, Jesus just seems to slip away from all the action. Sure, people keep talking about him in his absence, but Jesus is no longer on the stage as the story continues. Instead, the blind man, his neighbors, the Pharisees, and the Jewish leaders take over the action of this story.

And what happens is, the blind man is going this way (toward the Jesus on the right) while the Pharisees and the Jews are going this way (toward the Jesus on the left). And as they are moving, those two key themes that I've talked about in my sermons from the last couple of weeks continue to be at work. Those themes are light and darkness. Light, in John's gospel, means that a person is coming to believe or has become a believer in Jesus. They believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Word of God, the Son of God, the apocalyptic Son of Man who is coming into this world to usher in the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of Light where love, forgiveness, serving God, and serving others is *the Way* to live one's life. That's what it means to be in the light in John's gospel. A person in the light can see that this is who Jesus is.

To be in darkness, in John's gospel, is to be a person who *does not* believe that Jesus is the Messiah. To be in darkness, in John's gospel, means that one fails to see who Jesus really is. To be in darkness, in John's gospel, means that a person is *blind* to the Kingdom of God and to all that this kingdom has to offer.

Light and darkness are at work (moving hands in opposite directions) as this is going on. Jesus is off-stage, yet we see a person walking further and further into the light. This person is the man who had formerly been blind. He *was* blind. He was in the dark. But then Jesus came along. Jesus did things which led to his eyes being opened. Suddenly, he could see the light, and he moved closer and closer to the light of Christ. He moves from being blind to being able to see, and we also see him growing in faith in Jesus. As the story progresses, he begins to see more and more who Jesus really is. First he says *the man* named Jesus opened his eyes. Then, further along, he says that Jesus isn't *just* a man, but he is a prophet. And as the story continues, he finds himself taking sides with Jesus, saying to the Jewish leaders, "Do you *also* want to become his disciples?" That means that this "now seeing" man has claimed himself to be a disciple and follower and

believer of Jesus. And then he says, “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” As one who walks in the light, who has walked from here (beginning) to here (end), this “once blind now seeing” man has come a long way as he now claims that Jesus is from God. With his faith, he can see who Jesus truly is.

While the “now seeing” man has been moving this way throughout the story, his neighbors, the Pharisees, and the Jewish are moving the other way throughout the story. They all should be able to see what is going on, but they are becoming more and more blind throughout the story. It starts with the neighbors. They’ve seen this guy every day. They should be able to figure out that this is the same guy, but they argue and question: “Isn’t this the man who used to sit and beg?” They can’t see it, even though it should be as plain as day to them. Confused, they take this “now seeing” man to the Pharisees. They hear this man’s story, and they argue and show their blindness to Jesus, too. They become divided on who Jesus is. Some say, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others asked, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” They’re headed further and further into the dark. The Jewish leaders can’t believe the story that they’re told. They need more proof to believe what they’re seeing. They bring in the “now seeing” man’s parents to confirm that he had been born blind and wasn’t fake it or anything. And they continue to walk in darkness as the Jewish leaders say, “We are disciples of Moses....you were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” and they drive him out. These Jewish leaders, who are well-educated and religiously trained, you’d think that they should be able to see the signs of who Jesus is if he is able to heal a man born blind, but no. They are the most blind. The Jewish leaders walk in complete darkness as they kick this “now seeing” man—this new disciple of Jesus—to the curb.

It’s on the curb where once again Jesus comes into the picture. While the neighbors, the Pharisees, and the Jewish leaders have moved from light to darkness and have become blind, the “now seeing” man has moved from darkness to light throughout the story, and now, he finds himself face-to-face with the Word of God, Jesus, this Son of Man who was the one who started off this whole story to begin with. Out here on the curb, Jesus asks the question of this man that we’re all asked at some point during our lives. Jesus asks him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man responds, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that that I may believe in him.” And Jesus says, “You have *seen* him, and the one speaking with you is he.” And here, in the story, we see the “now seeing” man making the boldest confession in Jesus yet. He has moved from called Jesus a man, to

a prophet, to one worthy of being followed as a teacher, to one being from God, and now he calls him Lord, as he says, “Lord, I believe.” And he worships him just as though he would worship God. To worship Jesus is to declare that he is God. This is what a person who walks in the light and who can see who Jesus is would do. Those who walk in the light and who can see who Jesus is, they worship Jesus as God. Those who walk in darkness, however, are blind to this fact. They don’t get it, because they stand over here (gesture), where they see Jesus just as a man, and not over here (gesture), where Jesus is the living Word of God who is God who comes and lives among us as one of us in our flesh and bones.

Do you see it? Do you get it? Do you find yourself heading this way (toward the light), or are you heading that way (toward the darkness)? Surprisingly enough, this coming Wednesday, in our *The Body of Christ* series that we’ve been following, we’re going to be looking at the Eyes of Christ, and the gospel lesson will once again come from John chapter 9, although only the first eleven verses instead of all 41. We’ll keep thinking about what it means to no longer be blind, but what it means to see with a vision that recognizes that Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

The Lenten Journey continues, and we continue to follow where our Lord Jesus leads the way.