

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Lent 4

March 15, 2026

Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

*Open my eyes, Lord Jesus!*

–John 9:1-7,13-17,34-39

The man had never seen the sky. He could imagine what clouds look like, but he had never seen them. He had never gazed into his mother's eyes. He had never seen another human being smile at him. This wasn't a man who originally had his sight but lost it. This was a man who had never seen. Blind from birth. The visual world was completely beyond his experience. His lot in life was to sit and beg from passers-by. His whole life had been that way. Growing up, he was the handicapped child. Sometimes people treated him with special care and kindness. Other times he was probably marginalized and brushed aside.

Jesus' disciples saw this man, and their attitude reflects a combination of pity and contempt. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Can you detect a bit of holier-than-thou attitude in that question? The disciples' assumption was that this blind man must have done something to deserve his unfortunate lot in life. Surely he was getting what either he or his parents deserved! Isn't it funny how the disciples' comment sounds a lot like the Pharisee in the temple who prayed, "God, I thank you that I'm not like other people!"

Oh dear! Open my eyes, Lord Jesus! Open my eyes to see the truth! It wasn't just the physically blind man who needed to have his eyes opened to see clearly.

This is a teaching moment for Jesus. It's a time for his disciples to learn that God doesn't reward or punish people because we are more or less worthy. He does what he does and carries out his will because he is gracious and has a greater plan. "It was not that this man sinned, nor his parents, but that God's works might be revealed in connection with him I must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the World." Jesus brushes off the disciples' clumsy attempt to assign blame for the blindness, and he refocuses them on the reason he has come: The Light of the World came to cure blindness. He came to open the eyes of the blind, and he came to open the heart of the blind.

Now let's watch what happens, as Jesus does both. The first thing Jesus did was to spit on the ground. Then he made some mud with the saliva, and he spread the mud on the man's eyes. Interesting how Jesus does this. He doesn't just wave his hand over the blind man and say, "Be healed!" although he could have done that. He could have just spoken a word, and the miracle would have been done. Instead, Jesus gives some of himself to this man; he makes mud with his own spit. He let's the man feel his healing touch; he spread the mud on the man's eyes. How many times doesn't God work this way throughout Scripture – he works through tangible means, through things that we can touch and feel, so that we experience Jesus' love in very tangible ways. Jesus gives us himself in the Sacrament of Holy Communion – "This is my body, this is my blood" – and we experience his forgiveness in a very tangible way under the bread and the wine. Jesus washes us with water in Holy Baptism, and we are cleansed of our sins and clothed with perfection. Now Jesus brings about this healing using mud – simple, ordinary mud made from his own spit and the dust of Jerusalem's streets – and to this mud he attaches his command and promise: "Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam."

The man heeded Jesus' words, he went and washed, and the most staggering, mind-boggling thing happened: just like that, he came away seeing. Can you imagine what a life-changing moment this was? This man, who had never seen anything in his life, could now see with perfect, 20/20 vision. The sky. The grass. The hills. The rainbow. His parents. His whole life, his whole destiny was transformed by Jesus!

But now another group of people gets involved. The man's neighbors, who had watched this man beg and seen his handicap, now brought him to the *Pharisees*. The Pharisees decide they need to get to the bottom of this healing. Never mind the fact that a man who was formerly completely blind now could see perfectly. Never mind the fact that a former beggar could now be a productive, contributing member of society. Never mind the fact that this healing was undoubtedly done by the power of God Almighty. None of those things rose to the top of the Pharisees' list of priorities. What grabbed their attention was the fact that this amazing miracle happened on the Sabbath Day. Horror of horrors, Jesus had mixed mud, he had healed, he had done *manual labor* on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were reeling from shock.

Now who's blind?

An argument breaks out between different factions of the Pharisees. Some said, "This Jesus could not be from God. He breaks the Sabbath." Others argued, "How could a man do such a powerful miracle, if he didn't come from God?" You know, physical blindness, the kind of blindness the man had just been healed from, is a terrible thing. But spiritual blindness is worse. Can you imagine, having Jesus right there in your midst, seeing the Son of God in the flesh, and not being able to recognize that you're face to face with the Savior of the world? So they ask the man who was healed, "You're the one who received your sight. What do you think about Jesus?" The man replied, "He is a prophet."

For the sake of time and length, our Gospel today leaves out several verses in John's account and takes us directly to the exciting conclusion. But in verses 18 through 33, which are omitted, there are some interesting details that lend more context to what happened. First the Pharisees ask this man's parents if it's really their son who was healed and how it happened. His parents say, "Yes, he is our son, but we don't know what happened." They didn't want to take a stand because the Pharisees had threatened anyone who was a disciple of Jesus with getting booted out of the synagogue. Then they grill the formerly blind man some more, and the man's responses get more and more cheeky. The conversation gets to the point where the man says, "I keep telling you what happened, but you refuse to believe me. Why do you keep interrogating me? Do you Pharisees want to become Jesus' disciples? If this man weren't from God he couldn't do anything." And *that* is when the Pharisees tell him he's completely sinful, and they threw him out.

"You were steeped in sin from birth! How dare you lecture us!" Did you notice that the Pharisees are back to the same opinion that Jesus' disciple had when they first saw the man - this man must have done something wrong to get the blindness he deserved! The Pharisees couldn't see their own sin, but they were convinced they could see the sin of Jesus and the man he had healed.

Jesus heard that the Pharisees had thrown the man out, and when he finds the man he asks him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" the man replied. Jesus answered, "You have seen him, and he is the very one who is speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe!" and he knelt down and worshiped Jesus. Jesus' miracle was now complete. He had healed the man's eyes, and now he healed the man's heart. Jesus gave him his physical sight, and he gave him spiritual sight to see Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. And he worshiped Jesus as his Savior and Lord.

Then Jesus concluded with these chilling words, "For judgment I came into this world, in order that those who do not see will see, and those who do see will become blind." That's the way it is with Jesus. He touches the heart of a human being, and that person is given eyes of faith to see Jesus and trust in Jesus. But the same Jesus stands right in front of another person, and that person refuses to believe, and they remain as blind and stubborn and lost in spiritual darkness as they were before. The same Jesus opens the eyes of the blind and hardens the hearts of the arrogant. There's only one Savior, but they can't see it. They look everywhere else for the meaning of life, for purpose, for hope, and even though Jesus is right in front of them, they can't see him. This is why spiritual blindness, unbelief, is such a dreadful thing: a person *cannot* cause himself to see; a person *cannot* cure his own blindness. Only Jesus can rescue a lost, blind sinner who is stumbling through life on the road to hell. Only the Holy Spirit can open the eyes of a person's heart and give the gift of faith. As Luther says in his Small Catechism, "I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith . . ." "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).

God, in his mercy, has opened our eyes. Do you see what that means? Do you see what a precious gift he's given you? He's given us eyes of faith to see that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. You trust Jesus, and you have forgiveness and a right relationship with God. You look to the cross of Christ, and you see that Jesus died for you. Jesus is your precious Savior. Jesus is preparing for you a place in heaven. You can see beyond this life into eternity. Praise God that he has opened the eyes of the blind and given you eyes to see!

But even though the Holy Spirit has opened our eyes and given us faith, that doesn't mean we always see with 20/20 vision. There are many things that are still blurry or out of focus. There are many areas where we still suffer from tunnel vision, where we zero in on one thing but miss the bigger picture. So today let's pray: Open my eyes, Lord Jesus!

What are some things that we still struggle to see clearly? We struggle to see clearly what a big deal our sins really are, how serious they are. We think we have it all together, but without Jesus we are wretched, poor, naked and blind. Completely sinful! Open my eyes, Lord Jesus, to see the depth of my own natural depravity! We struggle to see how weak we are and how dangerous Satan is. We don't see him as a roaring lion on the prowl looking for someone to devour. Open my eyes, Lord Jesus, to see how much I need your Word and Sacrament for strength and clear vision.

We struggle to see clearly how vast and immense is God's love for us. His love for you is infinite. His love is measured by the sacrifice he made for you, his only-begotten Son, Jesus. Open my eyes, Lord Jesus, to see clearly how greatly you have loved me and how much you have given me and forgiven me!

As our focus sharpens, and the Lord opens our eyes to see more clearly, we see how precious and important is God's grace for us, what a treasure we have in the Word that is preached to us and the Sacrament that feeds us, how blessed we are to be in the fellowship of the church. The more clearly we see, the more we want to thank God and serve Jesus. The more clearly we see in this dark world, the more eagerly we look forward to seeing Jesus in heaven – not with eyes of faith but with our own eyeballs, face to face with our Savior forever. Amen.