

“To be a Pharisee, or not to be a Pharisee”

John 9:1-41

Today's reading was quite exhaustive, probably the longest reading of scripture I have done since I've been at Faith Church. However the whole story is important and stands as one complete piece of scripture. It would be easy to trim down the scriptures and pick only what sounds appealing to us. Yet I don't roll that way. I want the whole story, and I expect to tell all of you here today the full story.

In this whole story though, it stands well on its own. When I was studying the scriptures I find myself simply sitting at staring at it, digging in to all of my education trying to find something profound and unique that isn't seen in the story. It's hard to find something that isn't mentioned here. I say that because this is one of the few moments that when Christ speaks he is being very upfront with the listener. Sometimes we can get lost in other stories of Christ, but Christ doesn't beat around the bush in this one. I appreciate that quite a bit as a reader of scripture and as one who is trying to teach from the scriptures.

Today I am going to ask you to open up your pew bible and your own bible. Pick a bible, any bible. I am open to many translations of the bible today. Even if you have your Kindle with you, pull up the bible and dive in. What I plan to do is to approach this long passage very systematically, looking at important points. I think it would be helpful for us to have to it in front of us. If I had a screen I would go through it verse by verse that way, but today, we'll get the whole book experience.

I would like to begin by looking at 9:3, the verse where Jesus answers the question on who has sinned. Christ's answer is very forward, stating that no one has brought this ailment upon the blind man. The blind man is not blind because of other people or because of his parents

or anything like that. In fact the blind man is blind.

This particular verse is a verse that is often brought up when people are working through a theology of disability. Yes, there are people out there that spend their time discussing what means to be disabled from a theological standpoint. This verse brings in a dimension about God's work being shown through the blind man.

What does it mean to be made so that God's work can be shown through you? If you have questions on this passage and if it makes you a bit uneasy, then that is a good thing. I think we need to wrestle with what it means to have a disability. We often hear parents of down syndrome children saying how that they can see God's love through their child and experience what it means to truly care for another person. I don't think this verse takes away the pain and hardship of a disability. I don't think this verse takes away what it means to be different. Yet I do believe we can find hope in this verse.

I believe that as humans on this earth, we all experience some form of hardship. There is no getting around it. At some point in our lives we will hit a point where we feel that we cannot move forward. We'll hit a moment when we won't be able to do the things that we use to do. But there is hope in that. There is hope in that when we face those moments in our life when we feel that we can no longer move one, when we feel that we have been struck with such a condition that we cannot function as a normal person, Christ is there.

Like Christ healed the blind man and was present with him, so can Christ be there for you to heal your pain and hardship. You can be made whole into a complete person. Miracles do happen, but when they don't happen, you are not alone. Christ our healer is there to be with us on the journey and to be there to heal our spirits so that we can move forward in God.

Moving on this passage, after Christ states how works must be done, we have a passage

where Christ is speaking about himself as the light. This is a very brief point I am making, but I want you to be aware of how Christ is speaking of himself, when we are reading about a passage where Christ heals a blind man. We see light. The blind man when made whole can then see the light. The light is Christ.

So what we can take away from this little point is that when we recover from our ailments, whether they be physical, emotional, or spiritual, we can fully be made to see the light of Christ. It is Christ doing the work for us. We need to be open and allow Christ to work within us, so that we can see the light.

Now we come to the actual passage where Christ healed the blind man. As we read from verses 6 to 11 is when the act of healing occurred. We have it clear on what happened in the events. Christ merely acted and used his divine powers, showing the world that indeed he was the Son of Man who could perform such signs and miracles. In the gospel of John we frequently have Christ performing such acts so that others would know the power that he came from and so that other people would believe in Christ. Christ's work is not hidden in this gospel. It is there for all people to see and to experience. This experience is all for the past, the present, and the future to come.

The passage then comes to a long section on where the Pharisees then investigate the healing of this blind man. They go through an elaborate process, calling witnesses, finding grounds on which Christ broke the religious laws and so on and so forth. This section takes up a majority of the reading for today. I won't dive into it in detail, as we have already read it, but there are some key components as you keep in mind while looking at this passage.

The first component is look at how the Pharisees were afraid of Christ. Look how they went about their way of finding evidence against Christ. These were a people that were

threatened by the Son of Man.

Some of you though may not understand why these people would have been so scared of Christ. The Pharisees were a part of the ruling religious elite. They held power in the Jewish Sanhedrin, or council that ruled the Jewish people. They were highly invested in the religious laws for they felt power in the establishment. They felt that they had a place between the average person and God. They felt that they had a place in society that would elevate them above the hardships of the common person.

Christ offered a message that would completely upend that. Christ offered a message where God could interact with the common person. Christ offered a message that would allow the common person to have hope and have the hope for a better tomorrow. The people at the top were threatened by this message. The people at the top needed to people at the bottom to stay where they were, so they could exploit those who had no voice.

This still happens today. There are many places in our society where we are at the top, and we refuse to look down at those who are suffering. We can become so stuck on power that we no longer look at the person who is suffering as a human. It can become easy to push away a person who is unlike us and seems to struggle with life. We can get sick satisfaction, by being comfortable where we are.

This brings us to the other key point in this section of scripture, is that we can end up being Pharisees ourselves. It is not all that difficult to take us in our modern day, and place us in the scriptures. I say that, because we are humans just like they are in the story.

I find us as Pharisees when we begin to doubt the transforming healing and power of Christ. It is not difficult for us to think of a person who claims to have been changed in the faith, who claims that they are no longer stuck in the ways of their past life. We can begin to doubt

that. We can become the Pharisees and doubt the transforming power that can be right before us.

We can also become Pharisees when we take a long look at the gospel and refuse to accept the love of God that came through Christ Jesus. We have been given the opportunity for hope. I know of many people who have come to church their whole lives, but they fail to allow the gospel to speak to them and refuse to allow the gospel to speak through them. They don't realize the beauty and power that lies right there in front of them. We have to be open to the gospel, and to the message of hope that we hear so that others can know of Christ and know of the gospel that can bring them into a new life.

I say all of this harsh and heavy things here, so that we can see what is at stake when we are working with this story. I'm not done discussing this passage. Turn to the last section of the story, verses 35-41.

This is probably the most complex section of scripture in this passage. We have Christ stating his purpose in a way that those who are listening closely can understand what he is saying. It is easy to look at this passage and get the feeling that it is easy to be condemned by Christ rather than uplifted. This is the confusion that I face with this passage. If you don't give it a careful read, then the meaning can be lost, but I am here to help you through it.

I take the meat and potatoes of this section to be verse 39. "Jesus said, I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see maybe become blind." In my study of the scriptures what I understand is that Christ came into the world so that those who are without means in this world can have means, and those who do not have means in this world, will lose their means. Another way to say it, is that Christ came into the world for those who are broken so that that they may be made whole, and those that who exploit the broken will have their power taken away. That is my interpretation of the scripture.

As I have said in this sermon, this is a message of hope for people. Christ came for the sick and the poor, those who do not have the means to live in this world. Yet we don't have to despair at the bottom. Instead as a church, I see us having a role in bringing about a more just world so that the blind can see.

We have seen the destruction of what it means to be a Pharisee. We have seen the despair of what it means to be at the bottom and be blind. My question is this. What do we do as Faith Church so that we can make the blind see? This is a question that we need to be asking ourselves. I believe that we need to offer Christ first and foremost and allow the redeeming power of the gospel to work within people's lives. We need to be the people that welcome and allow people to become renewed.

We don't need to be Pharisees. The world is full of Pharisees. We need to be the catalyst, or way of bringing about the hope and peace of Christ in this world. Christ gave us this message, this story of a blind man, so that we can see the transforming power of Christ. This is what we need to do. It is right there for us to step out and to do. Christ has done so much for us, it is our turn to reach out and help the blind, so that they may see the light of God in this world. Amen.