

“Look & See”

The Rev. Drew Willard
UCC at The Villages, FL
March 30th, 2014
4th Sun. in Lent

1 Samuel 16:1-13

John 9:1-41

‘The Lord said,]

*“... People judge others by what they look like,
but I judge people by what is in their hearts.” 1 Samuel 16:17^b*

Let us pray... O God,

Help us not to just look at others and notice only what is different,
but help us to see the diversity of ways that people are unique.

Amen

The translation and drawings I did for this Gospel story of John 9,
are dedicated to The Rev. Dr. Harold Wilke.

He came to Lancaster Theological Seminary as a guest speaker,
representing a UCC ministry called The Healing Community –
which advocated for people with challenging disabilities.
Rev. Wilke himself was born without arms...

We had lunch with him at the Refectory and he could literally pick up a coffee cup
and drink from it with the toes of his foot.

When we were in class, he took his foot out of his slipper-shoe,
picked up a piece of chalk and wrote on the board.

I told him about my interest in Biblical storytelling
and shown him some of my drawings,
because Rev. Wilke challenged me to interpret this specific story :
John 9 – the healing of the blind man.

It has been many years since, but I finally did a paraphrased translation
with illustrations which I share with you today as a tribute to
Rev. Harold Wilke who died in 2003...

Ginny Thornburgh, Director of the Religion and Disability Program
at the National Organization on Disability said,

“Harold was the inspiration for our[program].

*His enthusiasm, self-acceptance, grit and twinkle
allowed him to be a role model and a superb leader.*

*He challenged all, with and without disabilities,
to heal the divisions among God’s children.*

Religious communities responded to his proclamation

that people with disabilities are welcome and needed in the House of God.”

<http://dis-obit.blogspot.com/2003/02/rev-harold-h-wilke-1914-2003.html>

Willard, p.2

She also said Rev. Wilke urged all churches and seminaries to recognize their 'obligation to welcome people with disabilities and see them as bringing gifts'.

<http://articles.latimes.com/2003/mar/01/local/me-wilke1/2>

People like Rev. Wilke who work to fully integrate people challenged by disability into society everywhere are part of a broader movement of human liberation, of freedom, of what it means to be 'saved' – fully alive in the sense of Jesus' promise for the abundant life, the life eternal.

The Bible is interwoven with many themes – foremost is the love of God for humankind, along with salvation and liberation, repentance and forgiveness of sin, healing of body, mind, and spirit, the advocacy of the poor, and the adoption of the 'least of these' into the beloved community of God's Kingdom of Heaven.

There is a recurring theme of overcoming the particular sin of prejudice.

Like sin in general, it is part of our make-up as finite human beings.

We all have prejudice, we all have a bias,

we all have a perspective from which we view the world.

If you think you don't, just wait till election-time when someone will be more than happy to point out the errors in your judgment...

How we 'look at' the world is very much shaped by society.

Do you remember those "Dick and Jane" reading primers,

that perhaps you or your children read in learning how to read.

The very first word that was taught was "Look"... and soon after, the word "See"...

"Look, look. Oh, look. See Jane. See, see. See Jane. Oh, see Jane."

http://www.tagnwag.com/forsale/dick_jane_pages/matted/NWLS/index-nwls.html

There is a difference between looking and seeing.

If we just look, we get stuck on appearances – and what we *think about* them.

That's what prejudice is about and why prejudice can be so destructive.

First impressions can be a block to really getting to know someone.

When we take the time to see, we are making the effort

to really get to know and understand.

Then of course, you can make an informed judgment instead of reacting by instinct.

We cannot escape our perspective, our bias, our prejudice,

but we can educate ourselves to broaden our view.

We must even have a dialogue within ourselves –to catch ourselves,

to challenge ourselves when faced with the temptation

to act on our prejudices.

Leering stares, or scornful looks, or just looking away to ignore someone can be forms of violence all their own.

We have to filter our "thinking about" others or certain situations.

Willard, p.3

‘Listen, then, if you have ears’, is something Jesus frequently said to his followers.

It means the same thing as the Indian proverb:

‘Listen, or your tongue will keep you deaf.’

Listen, or your fear, anger, or indifference will keep you from understanding someone – and the daily news is filled with stories about people acting out their ignorance, their prejudice.

The Gospel lesson began with Jesus challenging the common notion that people with a handicapping condition somehow deserved it – and when someone is born that way, who is to blame?

‘Who sinned?’ is the question his disciples asked.

Instead, Jesus tells them that when we encounter such misfortunes in the lives of others – or even our own lives, they can become the occasion to bring people together to help each other and bring a blessing.

The healing of a person born blind is so remarkable that the people who witness this event take this fellow to their religious leaders to explain it.

But when the Pharisees hear Jesus was involved and Sabbath laws were broken, they are kept blind to the miracle before them.

Like the unnamed Samaritan woman in last week’s Gospel story, this unnamed blind, homeless man is restored to his community as a person of dignity and self-worth.

When the authorities fail to get him to support their case against Jesus – even by putting pressure on his family to discredit him, they dismiss him as a sinner and drive him out of the community.

Abandoned and back on the street, little seems to have changed for this fellow – except that he can now see.

It is then that Jesus shows up after searching for this man who had been blind and reveals to him his identity as the Son of Man, the Human One in whose image we are all created.

From my brief encounter with The Rev. Dr. Harold Wilke, I am sure John Chapter 9 was a great affirmation to him personally and in his work – especially to get churches not only to make room for people who are differently-abled, but also to see them as a gift.

May we all be able to see how each of us are people of dignity, unique in our gifts and worthy of respect.

Amen

*Our lesson today from I Samuel 16:1-13 is about the call of David
to be anointed as King of Israel – even though he was still a youth.
This was shortly before he would fight Goliath the giant...*

- [16: 1] One day [the Lord] said,
“Samuel, I’ve rejected Saul, and I refuse to let him be king any longer.
Stop feeling sad about him.
Put some olive oil in a small container and go visit a man named Jesse,
who lives in Bethlehem. I’ve chosen one of his sons to be my king.”
- [2] Samuel answered,
“If I do that, Saul will find out and have me killed.”
- “Take a calf with you,” the Lord replied.
“Tell everyone that you’ve come to offer it as a sacrifice to me,
[3] then invite Jesse to the sacrifice.
When I show you which one of his sons I have chosen,
pour the olive oil on his head.”
- [4] Samuel did what the Lord told him and went to Bethlehem.
The town leaders went to meet him, but they were terribly afraid and asked,
“Is this a friendly visit?”
- [5] “Yes, it is!” Samuel answered. “I’ve come to offer a sacrifice to the Lord.
Get yourselves ready to take part in the sacrifice and come with me.”
Samuel also invited Jesse and his sons to come to the sacrifice,
and he got them ready to take part.
- [6] When Jesse and his sons arrived, Samuel noticed Jesse’s oldest son, El-iab.
“He has to be the one the Lord has chosen,” Samuel said to himself.
- [7] But the Lord told him,
“Samuel, don’t think El-iab is the one just because he’s tall and handsome.
He isn’t the one I’ve chosen.
People judge others by what they look like,
but I judge people by what is in their hearts.”
- [8] Jesse told his son A-bin’a-dab to go over to Samuel, but Samuel said,
“No, the Lord hasn’t chosen him.”
- [9] Next, Jesse sent his son Sham-mah to him, and Samuel said,
“The Lord hasn’t chosen him either.”
- [10] Jesse had all seven of his sons go over to Samuel. Finally, Samuel said,
“Jesse, the Lord hasn’t chosen any of these young men.
[11] Do you have any more sons?”
- “Yes,” Jesse answered.
“My youngest son David is out taking care of the sheep.”
- “Send for him!” Samuel said.
“We won’t start the ceremony until he gets here.”
- [12] Jesse sent for David.
He was a healthy, good-looking boy with a sparkle in his eyes.
As soon as David came, the Lord told Samuel,
“He’s the one! Get up and pour the olive oil on his head.”
- [13] Samuel poured the oil on David’s head while his brothers watched.
At that moment, the Spirit of the Lord took control of David
and stayed with him from then on.
Samuel returned home to Ra-mah’.

Let us be guided and challenged by these words.



THIS PERSON WASHED HIS FACE AND BECAME ABLE TO SEE!

John 9:1-41

“Look & See” dedicated to The Rev. Harold Wilke

[9:1-7]

**AND WALKING TOGETHER, JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES SAW
A BLIND PERSON – BLIND SINCE BIRTH.**

AND HIS DISCIPLES ASKED HIM,

**“RABBI, WHO SINNED – THE PERSON OR THE PARENTS
SUCH THAT SOMEONE BE BORN BLIND?”**

JESUS ANSWERED,

**“NEITHER THIS PERSON SINNED NOR HIS PARENTS,
BUT RATHER GOD IS AT WORK TO BE DISCOVERED.**

AND WE MUST BE BUSY DOING THE WORK

THAT ‘THE ONE WHO IS’ HAS SENT ME TO DO.

NIGHT IS COMING WHEN NO ONE CAN WORK,

BUT IT IS STILL DAYLIGHT.

WHENEVER I AM PRESENT IN THE WORLD,

I AM THE GUIDING LIGHT FOR THE WORLD.”

HAVING SAID THIS, HE SPIT ON THE GROUND

AND MADE A PASTE OF MUD AND SPITTLE;

THEN, HE APPLIED IT TO THIS PERSON’S EYES.

AND JESUS SAID TO HIM,

“GO WASH UP IN THE PUBLIC WATERS OF SILOAM.”

SILOAM MEANS ‘DESTINY’ AND SO VENTURING OUT,

THIS PERSON WASHED HIS FACE...

AND BECAME ABLE TO SEE!



AND THEY SAID TO HIM, "WHERE IS THAT FELLOW?" HE SAID, "I DON'T KNOW."

[9:8-12]

THEN, HIS NEIGHBORS AND OTHERS WHO OFTEN SAW HIM
PANHANDLING, SAID,

"ISN'T THIS THE ONE WHO LOITERS HERE TO BEG?"

SOME SAID,

"THAT'S THE ONE!"

OTHERS SAID,

"NO, BUT THEY SURE WOULD LOOK ALIKE."

THIS PERSON SAID,

"HEY, IT'S ME!"

THEN, THEY SAID TO HIM,

"SO, HOW WERE YOUR EYES OPENED?"

HE ANSWERED,

"THAT PERSON CALLED JESUS MIXED SOME CLAY,

PUT IT ON MY EYES, AND TOLD ME TO

GET ALONG TO SILOAM AND WASH UP;

AND AFTER WASHING MY FACE, I COULD SEE!"

AND THEY SAID TO HIM,

"WHERE IS THAT FELLOW?"

HE SAID,

"I DON'T KNOW."



THE PHARISEES ASKED HIM HOW HE RECEIVED HIS SIGHT...

[9:13-17]

TAKING HIM TO THE PHARISEES,
[THEY SOUGHT AN EXPLANATION ABOUT]
THIS ONE WHO [WAS NO LONGER] BLIND.
NOW, IT WAS THE SABBATH DAY ON WHICH
JESUS MIXED THE CLAY AND HEALED THIS PERSON'S EYES.

AND AGAIN,
THE PHARISEES ASKED HIM HOW HE RECEIVED HIS SIGHT,
SO HE SAID TO THEM,
"JESUS PUT MUD ON MY EYES AND I WASHED – NOW I SEE!"
THEN, SOME OF THE PHARISEES SAID,
"THIS FELLOW IS NOT RESPECTFUL OF GOD,
BEING SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T KEEP THE SABBATH."
BUT OTHERS SAID,
"HOW CAN A SINFUL PERSON DO SUCH MIRACLES?"
AND THEY WERE SPLIT BY THEIR OPINIONS.

THEN, THEY SAID TO THE 'BLIND' PERSON AGAIN,
"WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY ABOUT
THE ONE WHO OPENED YOUR EYES?"
AND HE SAID,
"THAT FELLOW MUST BE A PROPHET."



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...HIS PARENTS SAID, "HE'S AN ADULT. ASK HIM!"

[9:18-23]

THEN, THE JUDEANS BEGAN TO HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT HIM
BEING BORN BLIND AND RECEIVING SIGHT
UNTIL THEY SUMMONED THE PARENTS
OF THIS ONE WHO SUPPOSEDLY BECAME A SEEING PERSON.

SO, THEY ASKED THE PARENTS SAYING,
"IS THIS YOUR SON WHO YOU SAY WAS BORN BLIND?
HOW IS IT THAT HE CAN SEE NOW?"
HIS PARENTS ANSWERED AND SAID,
"WE KNOW THAT THIS IS OUR SON
AND THAT HE WAS BORN BLIND.
BUT AS TO HOW HE CAN SEE NOW OR
WHO OPENED HIS EYES, WE DON'T KNOW!
ASK HIM! HE'S AN ADULT. HE CAN SPEAK FOR HIMSELF!"

HIS PARENTS SAID THIS BECAUSE THEY WERE AFRAID
OF THE POLITICIZED JUDEANS.
FOR THESE JUDEANS CONSPIRED THAT
IF ANYONE BORE WITNESS TO JESUS AS THE MESSIAH,
THEY WOULD BE EXCLUDED
FROM THE CONGREGATION.
IT WAS BECAUSE OF THIS THAT HIS PARENTS SAID,
'HE'S AN ADULT. ASK HIM!'



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AND HE ANSWERED THEM, "I ALREADY TOLD YOU AND YOU WOULDN'T LISTEN.

[9:24-29]

NOW, FOR THE SECOND TIME,

THEY SUMMONED THIS PERSON WHO HAD BEEN BLIND.
AND THEY SAID TO HIM,

"PRAISE GOD THAT WE HAVE FIGURED OUT THAT
THIS MAN JESUS IS A SINNER!"

THEN, HE ANSWERED,

"IF HE IS A SINNER OR NOT, I DON'T KNOW.

ONE THING I DO KNOW IS THAT I WAS BLIND
AND NOW I SEE!"

THEN, THEY SAID TO HIM,

"WHAT DID HE DO TO YOU?"

"HOW DID HE OPEN YOUR EYES?"

AND HE ANSWERED THEM,

"I ALREADY TOLD YOU AND YOU WOULDN'T LISTEN.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO JUST IGNORE ME AGAIN?
WOULD YOU RATHER LEARN FROM HIM DIRECTLY?"

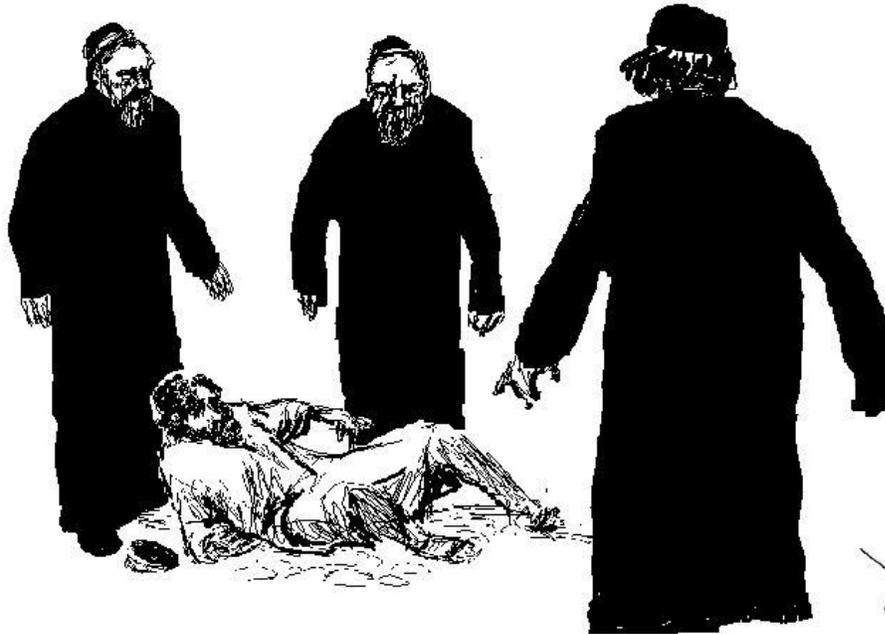
AND THEY SHOVED HIM AND SAID,

"YOU ARE HIS STUDENT,

BUT WE ARE STUDENTS OF MOSES!

WE KNOW THAT MOSES SPOKE FOR GOD,

BUT WE DON'T KNOW WHERE THIS JESUS
IS COMING FROM!"



...THEY THREW HIM OUT.

[9:30-34]

THE MAN ANSWERED AND SAID TO THEM,
“THIS IS AMAZING THAT YOU DON’T KNOW
WHERE HE IS COMING FROM,
YET HE OPENED MY EYES!
WE ALL KNOW THAT GOD DOESN’T LISTEN
TO THE GUILTY.
BUT IF SOMEONE LOVES GOD AND LOVES OTHERS,
THEY WILL BE LISTENED TO.
SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME,
NO ONE’S EVER HEARD OF SOMEONE BORN BLIND
WHOSE EYES WERE OPENED TO SEE.
IF GOD WASN’T WITH THIS FELLOW,
HE COULDN’T DO WHAT HE DID!”

THEN, THEY REPLIED, TELLING HIM,
“YOU WERE BORN STAINED WITH GUILT,
YET YOU PRESUME TO LECTURE US?”
SO THEY THREW HIM OUT.



JESUS HEARD THAT THE MAN HAD BEEN EXCOMMUNICATED
AND FINDING HIM, SAID, "DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE 'SON OF MAN'?"

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[9:35-39]

JESUS HEARD THAT THE MAN HAD BEEN EXCOMMUNICATED
AND AFTER SEARCHING FOR HIM, SAID,

"DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE 'SON OF MAN' WHO WILL BE
THE TRUE HEIR AND JUDGE OF HUMANITY?"

AND THE MAN ANSWERED HIM AND SAID,

"SO, WHO IS HE, SIR?

I'D BELIEVE IN HIM."

AND JESUS SAID TO HIM,

"YOU'RE LOOKING AT HIM,

THE ONE WHO IS SPEAKING TO YOU NOW."

THUS, THE MAN PROFESSED,

"I BELIEVE IN YOU, LORD!"

AND HE KNELT BEFORE JESUS.

THEN, JESUS SAID,

"I HAVE COME INTO THE WORLD TO DISCERN JUSTICE
SO THAT THOSE WHO ARE BLIND MAY SEE
AND THOSE WHO ONLY LOOK STAY BLIND."

John.9:1-9

[1] As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth.

[2] And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

[3] Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.

[4] We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work.

[5] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

[6] As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay,

[7] saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Silo'am" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

[8] The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?"

[9] Some said, "It is he"; others said, "No, but he is like him." He said, "I am the man."

[10] They said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"

[11] He answered, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Silo'am and wash'; so I went and washed and received my sight."

[12] They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

[13] They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

[14] Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.

[15] The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

[16] Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" There was a division among them.

[17] So they again said to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

[18] The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight,

[19] and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

[20] His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;

[21] but how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself."

[22] His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if any one should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.

[23] Therefore his parents said, "He is of age, ask him."

[24] So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner."

[25] He answered, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see."

[26] They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

[27] He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too want to become his disciples?"

[28] And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.

[29] We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

[30] The man answered, "Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.

[31] We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.

[32] Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind.

[33] If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

[34] They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

[35] Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of man?"

[36] He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"

[37] Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you."

[38] He said, "Lord, I believe"; and he worshiped him.

[39] Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."