

“Insight for the Blind”

The Rev. Drew Willard  
UCC at The Villages, FL  
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4<sup>th</sup> Sun. in Lent

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16:1-13

John 9:1-41

*But the LORD told him,*

*“Samuel, don’t think Eliab 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.”*

*1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16:7*

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to see others as fellow travelers on the journey of life,  
who sometimes need our help –

and whose help we sometimes need ourselves.

Mainly, help us to recognize the dignity of those who might otherwise be invisible.

Amen

The Gospel lesson today is another example of lengthy narratives  
that serve to give us a portrait of someone who becomes a believer in Christ.

Last week, we had that wonderful story about the Samaritan woman  
who encounters Jesus at Jacob’s well.

Another example is the story about Martha and Mary of Bethany  
and the raising of their brother Lazarus from death.

This story is also about a chapter long, as it tells about the healing  
of a man blind from birth and the ensuing conflict with the religious authorities  
over Jesus’ unauthorized medical procedures.

This story in particular is also about the arrogance of those authorities  
and the blindness that can keep people from really seeing each other –  
especially, people challenged by poverty and disability...

My paraphrase of John 9 with illustrations was accomplished in 2007  
as a response to a specific challenge to do so by a guest speaker  
at my seminary around 30 years before.

While at Lancaster Theological Seminary, I met The Rev. Harold Wilke,  
an ordained UCC minister, pastor, and activist for disability issues –  
who had been born without arms...

He had lunch with us in the refectory,

where we had a chance to talk with him and to see him –

to see him eat with his feet and hold a coffee cup with his toes,  
and drink from it.

Later, in class, I saw him sit on a stool and slip his foot out of his shoe,  
pick up a piece of chalk, and write on the board.

Willard, p.2

Years later, Rev. Wilke was invited to Washington, DC,  
and attend when Pres. George HW Bush signed into law  
the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, which  
*'guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities  
in public accommodations, employment, transportation,  
state and local government services, and telecommunications.'*

<https://adata.org/learn-about-ada>

He gave an invocation –

which is believed to be a first for the signing of a Congressional bill,  
and Pres. Bush gave him a commemorative pen,  
which he put into his shoe.

Afterwards, while sitting next to Mrs. Barbara Bush, he took the pen out  
and tucked it into his coat, eliciting a 'roar of approval' f  
rom those who were gathered there!

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

During that visit to Lancaster,

I had the opportunity to tell him about a project I was working on –  
which was a Bible story 'graphic novel'.

It was then that he asked me to do one about John 9  
and Jesus' healing of the blind man.

Though not the same thing as a graphic novel,

I finally interpreted this story as you heard and saw this morning in 2007.

Though Rev. Wilke passed away in 2003, I have dedicated this project  
to his memory.

Rev. Wilke helped to make people with disabilities more visible in our society  
and that is a matter of not just looking at others to categorize, label,  
and dismiss them as 'those people'...

Like God who told the Prophet Samuel,

*People judge others by what they look like,*

*but I judge people by what is in their hearts."* [1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16:7<sup>b</sup>],  
in the same way, Jesus saw something in this fellow who was blind.

Though he healed from a condition he had since birth,

the Pharisees still considered him a sinner who deserved his affliction.

Yet like a good doctor, Jesus made a follow up visit

and went looking for this man who had been blind,

but now suffered for speaking his mind.

When he found him, Jesus gave him a gift,

he gave this person a private introduction to his identity

as the Son of Man – the True Heir of what it means to be human  
and in the process, affirmed this person's dignity.

Amen

*Our lesson today from 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16:1-13 is about the anointing of David to become the future king of Israel...*

<sup>1</sup> One day [God] 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<sup>[a]</sup> in a small container<sup>[b]</sup>  
and go visit a man named Jesse, who lives in Bethlehem.  
I’ve chosen one of his sons to be my king.”

<sup>2</sup> 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,  
<sup>3</sup> then invite Jesse to the sacrifice.<sup>[c]</sup>

When I show you which one of his sons I have chosen,  
pour the olive oil on his head.”

<sup>4</sup> 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?”

<sup>5</sup> “Yes, it is!” Samuel answered.

“I’ve come to offer a sacrifice to the LORD.

Get yourselves ready<sup>[d]</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> When Jesse and his sons arrived,

Samuel noticed Jesse’s oldest son, Eliab.

“He has to be the one the LORD has chosen,” Samuel said to himself.

<sup>7</sup> But the LORD told him,

“Samuel, don’t think Eliab 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.”

<sup>8</sup> Jesse told his son Abinadab to go over to Samuel, but Samuel said,

“No, the LORD hasn’t chosen him.”

<sup>9</sup> Next, Jesse sent his son Shammah to him, and Samuel said,

“The LORD hasn’t chosen him either.”

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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.”

<sup>12</sup> 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.”<sup>[e]</sup>

<sup>13</sup> 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 Ramah.

*Let us be challenged and guided by these words...*

John 9:1-41

<sup>1</sup>As he passed by, [Jesus] saw a man blind from his birth.

<sup>2</sup>And his disciples asked him,

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

<sup>3</sup>Jesus answered,

“It was not that this man sinned, or his parents,  
but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.

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

<sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

<sup>6</sup>As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle  
and anointed the man’s eyes with the clay, <sup>7</sup>saying to him,

“Go, wash in the pool of Silo’am” (which means Sent).

So he went and washed  
and came back seeing.

<sup>8</sup>The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said,

“Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?”

<sup>9</sup>Some said, “It is he”; others said, “No, but he is like him.”

He said, “I am the man.”

<sup>10</sup>They said to him,

“Then how were your eyes opened?”

<sup>11</sup>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.”

<sup>12</sup>They said to him, “Where is he?”

He said, “I do not know.”

<sup>13</sup>They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

<sup>14</sup>Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.

<sup>15</sup>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.”

<sup>16</sup>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.

<sup>17</sup>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.”

<sup>18</sup>The [Judeans] 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,  
<sup>19</sup>and asked them,  
“Is this your son, who you say was born blind?  
How then does he now see?”

<sup>20</sup>His parents answered,  
“We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;  
<sup>21</sup>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.”

<sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>Therefore his parents said,  
“He is of age, ask him.”

<sup>24</sup>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.”

<sup>25</sup>He answered,  
“Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know,  
that though I was blind, now I see.”

<sup>26</sup>They said to him,  
“What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

<sup>27</sup>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?”

<sup>28</sup>And they reviled him, saying,  
“You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.  
<sup>29</sup>We know that God has spoken to Moses,  
but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”

<sup>30</sup>The man answered,  
“Why, this is a marvel!  
You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.  
<sup>31</sup>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.  
<sup>32</sup>Never since the world began has it been heard  
that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind.  
<sup>33</sup>If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

<sup>34</sup>They answered him,  
“You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?”  
And they cast him out.

- <sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said,  
“Do you believe in the Son of man?”<sup>[a]</sup>
- <sup>36</sup> He answered,  
“And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”
- <sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him,  
“You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you.”
- <sup>38</sup> He said,  
“Lord, I believe”; and he worshiped him.
- <sup>39</sup> 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.”
- <sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him,  
“Are we also blind?”
- <sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them,  
“If you were blind, you would have no guilt;  
but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

# "Look & See" John 9:1-39



THIS PERSON WASHED HIS FACE AND BECAME ABLE TO SEE!



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



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



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



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



...THEY THREW HIM OUT.



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