

**Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year A, 2.iii.2008, 10:00 a.m.**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania**  
**Holy Eucharist, *ELW* Setting 5**  
**I Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41**

# **J. J. !**

The Holy Gospel according to Saint John, the 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter . .

.

Because of the length of today's Gospel, and because I will be preaching on it in segments, I invite you to please be seated.

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

**9:1 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.**

**9:2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"**

**9:3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.**

The Disciples of Jesus are those He has called from among the people. As such, they have learned to view the world and others in terms of blame and shame. This is how they solve the problem of evil and suffering, making suffering into God's punishment for the evil of the sufferers or the fault of their ancestors. Even today and among us, many refuse to believe that the poverty of the poor, the hunger of the hungry or the suffering of the sick is caused by anything but the guilt of the sufferer or the bad will of some other person. Christ teaches us to see suffering and tragedy not as a punishment for sin, but as an occasion for the glory of God, as a moment when we are called to expect the Father to reach out to us as His sons and daughters, as an

obstacle which the Holy Spirit will give us the strength to overcome, if not in time, then in eternity.

**9:4 We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.**

**9:5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."**

**9:6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes,**

That moment is always *now*, not some other day, not when we are more prepared or more rested, not when we understand the problems of the world or the need of our neighbor more clearly. The blind beggar did not cry out to Jesus. Others will not always ask us to help. The world does not ask the Church to help, having experience enough of the impact of religion on peace. When the need is there, we, as the living Body of Christ, are to respond to that need as Jesus does. Not all problems can be solved. Not all suffering can be eased. To the cancer specialist today, who

has lost yet another patient and who is called to treat yet another one, it may seem that medicine has little more than dirt and spittle with which to fight. But, where faith in the Father's love is alive, where that love can be communicated to the sufferer, healing and wholeness of the most lasting sort can happen and the eyes of all can be opened to see the goodness that lies beyond the present evil.

**9:7 [Jesus said to the man:] "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.**

**9:8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?"**

**9:9 Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man."**

**9:10 But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"**

**9:11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight."**

**9:12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."**

**9:13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.**

**9:14 Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.**

**9:15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see."**

**9:16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided.**

Those who have predetermined how God shall act and how God shall *not* act have forgotten an essential truth, viz., that *God* is God and *we* are not. The written Word of God, commanding the Sabbath rest and containing the LORD's promise to visit vengeance on the descendants of those who forsake Him, is used here against the mercy of God acted out before the very eyes of those zealous for God's law. Obedience trumps compassion, in their view. What happened was not supposed to happen in the way it happened and to the one to whom it happened. But the

Father does not ask our permission to love us; the Son does not consult us before healing our blindness, neither the patient nor the bystanders.

**9:17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."**

**9:18 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**

**9:19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"**

**9:20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;**

**9:21 but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself."**

**9:22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.**

**9:23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."**

No one had more authority to speak about the miracle than the man who had lived his whole life blind but who could now see because of what Jesus had done for him. And yet,

because the miracle did not fit the expectation of the people, his word and that of his parents is doubted. Jesus' critics, the Sabbath fanatics, were not expecting God to do anything, not really, content as they were with reading and rereading what God *had* done. How many things has God done for us which go unnoticed because they are not expected?

**9:24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner."**

**9:25 He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."**

**9:26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"**

**9:27 He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"**

**9:28 Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses."**

**9:29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."**

**9:30 The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.**

**9:31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.**

**9:32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.**

**9:33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."**

**9:34 They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.**

In a cruel irony, the man whose sight gives glory to God is now called upon to ‘glorify God’ by telling a convenient lie. He is treated shamefully, like so much trash. His tormenters want him to apologize for saying that he can see, for saying that he had been blind, for the fact that he breathes and takes up space. His sort—the poor, the suffering—do not fit into their view of the world and of God. How *dare* this sinner attract so much attention to himself and to that Anti-Messiah from Galilee Who spent most of His time not with the pious and observant but with

the scum of the earth?! The one toward whom the eternal Word of God made flesh bowed down, the one whose blindness was the occasion for him to be touched by the healing hands of God, is made a fool of and thrown out of their holy circle as a cheap fake, as the front man for a charlatan. They, who never lifted a finger to help him or his kind, who would never have thought of stopping to help him on the Sabbath or any other day, now show their power over the little people, over this little man who refused to knuckle under to them. He says what he knows and not more than he knows. He knows that he was blind, that someone whose name he does not yet know did something to his eyes, that he can see, that this must be the work of God and that, therefore, the man through whom this work was accomplished must be a *Nabi*, literally, ‘one who is in the spirit of God,’ i.e., a Prophet.

**9:35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"**

**9:36 He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."**

**9:37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen Him, and the one speaking with you is He."**

**9:38 He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.**

These are four of the most beautiful and powerful verses in the whole Bible. Jesus *hears* what happened to this poor man and Jesus goes immediately to *find* him. Jesus does not waste any time on the man's attackers. He will deal with them later. Our Lord is, after all, responsible for the man's situation—the ability now to see which is such an offense to those who have abused him and driven him out—and Christ takes responsibility for the man. He goes to find Him and He speaks *with* Him, *personally*. As far as we know, these are the first words that the two have exchanged, for at the time of the man's healing, Jesus simply commanded him to go to the pool of Siloam to wash

and the man went and returned sighted. Their conversation is similar to that between Jesus and Saint Photina at Jacob's Well in last Sunday's Gospel, but here the experience of faith, an experience of profound conversion, seems more transparent and more intense. Now, when Jesus speaks with the man, now, when the man can see the One Who healed him, the man accepts Jesus' teaching by faith that this is the work of the 'Son of Man.' It is curious that Christian tradition does not identify this man by name. Perhaps that is because he did not live long enough after the miracle to be remembered by name, so great must have been the seething anger of the religious fanatics against him.

**9:39 Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."**

**9:40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?"**

**9:41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.**

After finding the man who was blind but could now see, both with his eyes and with his soul, Jesus turns at last to the man's tormentors, to those so sure of their own vision that they are spiritually blind. They condemn themselves with their sarcastic question. What a contrast in attitude before the same Lord of all! Even and particularly after we experience a breakthrough in our own spiritual blindness, a miracle of sight through the Holy Spirit in enabling us to see ourselves and others as God sees, with honesty, mercy and compassion, let us welcome and not hinder the Christ Who rebukes our own blindness by turning our hollow words back upon us and Who calls us to repent, even at this late hour, even on this Fourth Sunday in Lent. Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ! ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins  
by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His  
God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the  
Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠ Amen.

