

## **“When Eyes are Opened”**

John 9: 1-41

Desert Palm United Church of Christ

March 2, 2008 – The Fourth Sunday in Lent

All rise! Court is now in session. Prosecuting Pharisee John of Tempe, presiding.

Be seated. In the matter of the people versus Jesus of Nazareth. Please read the deposition from the Temple police, which deposition was composed during the evening hours that constituted the beginning of the first day **following** the last Sabbath day, the Sabbath day during which these events allegedly occurred.

**The accused- Jesus- and a group of his followers, identified as his “disciples,” entered the environs of the city of Jerusalem this past Sabbath day.**

**As they walked along, they saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”**

**The accused answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work 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.”**

**When he had said this, the accused spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means *Sent*). Then [the man] went and washed and came back able to see.**

Call the first witnesses. State your names. I understand you are neighbors of this blind beggar- yes? What? You’re not sure? How can you not be sure? Is this not the man who used to sit and beg? One of you says, “It is he.” The other says, “No, but it is someone like him?” Someone *like* him? Please, open your eyes, people. Is everybody blind here? Certainly the fact that this man has regained his sight should not interfere with your perception of who he is! -Unless you previously identified him by rag he wore to cover his eyes, the symbol that made him less than you! Make up your minds. We need the corroboration of at least two witnesses here in order for this to be a legal inquiry! ... Acchh! Scribe, read me their affidavits!

**We kept asking the blind man, “Then how were your eyes opened?”**

**He answered us, “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.”**

**We said to him, “Where is this Jesus?”**

**He said, “I do not know.”**

Second-hand, hearsay evidence! Bailiff, bring me this blind man who is not a blind man.

My friend, I must tell you that the charges against this Jesus fellow are concerned with events that took place on the Sabbath just past. How long were you blind? Since birth. Was your sight

restored to you on that Sabbath day? Yes. I see. Now. How was this done?

Let me get this...“He put **mud** on your eyes? Then you washed? and now you see?”

And where did the accused Jesus find this mud? The weather on the Sabbath was dry, as I recall. Oh, you heard him spit, and bend over at your feet, **and you heard the sounds of his hands doing something in the earth?** Then he put this profane and unclean substance on your eyes. And after you washed it off and you could see. So...you testify that he performed the intentional activity of mixing up a healing poultice of mud, and that he did this act on the Sabbath day? Aha! Surely, then, this man Jesus cannot be from God, for he performs work on the day of rest; he does not observe the Sabbath. Yes, that’s what your testimony implies- this Jesus broke the Sabbath.

There is, however, an additional question: how can someone like the accused Jesus, who is so obviously a sinner, perform such a miracle? **You’re** the one he healed. What do **you** say about him? It was your eyes he opened! Is this man Jesus a sinner?

What did you say? He is a **prophet?**

Impossible! Just like this unlikely miracle. The Lord God, bless that holy name, would **never** intervene by participating in such an act of power on God’s **own** Sabbath. Do you think that the Sabbath was made for **people?** No, the Sabbath was made for **God!** In fact I am beginning to suspect that you were never even blind in the first place. I suspect that you were just pretending to be without sight so that you could go about your business of begging more easily. Such a fraudulent miracle happening on the Sabbath must have been motivated by the darkest powers

of evil! I think perhaps you are an accomplice to this Jesus character.

Bailiff, summon this man’s parents.

Is this your son? Yes. And he was born blind? Yes. How then does he now see? Answer me that! Why do you tremble so? We are here to discover the truth. Oh, how convenient- you say you do not know how it is that now he sees. So you don’t know who opened his eyes.

What are you suggesting now? You say, “Ask **him**. He is of age. He will speak for himself.” You two cowards! You would pass the responsibility back to him just to protect yourselves. What kind of parents are you?

Bailiff, bring in the blind man again.

Again, my young friend, all we need to hear from you is a single statement. Why not just give glory to God and say this **Jesus is a sinner?**

What do you mean, you don’t know whether he’s a sinner or not? “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

What did he **really** do to you? How did he open your eyes? Don’t insult my intelligence again! And, No, I don’t want to be his disciple, myself! Are you mad? I demand that you lead our officers outside and find this man who healed you!

What? You don’t know what he **looks** like? -Because you were blind when you were with him. Now I get it! **You** are his disciple, aren’t you- a collaborator? That makes you just as guilty as he is, disciple!

Well, we in this court are disciples of Moses the lawgiver. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man Jesus, we have no idea where **he** comes from.

What are you muttering about? Stenographer, read that back to me!

**“Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”**

You! You...you who were born entirely in sin, and now **you** are trying to teach **us** the law? Get out of our sight.” All we needed here was for just two witnesses to say that the accused, Jesus, violated the Sabbath law by doing work. None of these witnesses have provided enough evidence to convict this Jesus of blasphemy! Your confusion has made a mockery of God’s justice, and I am not pleased!

As for the rest of you who have been part of this incident, could you also be convicted of violating God’s Law? Are any of you actually good enough- worthy enough- righteous enough- to sit in my place and pass judgment today? Have any of you violated **this** Sabbath by performing work? Cooking? Drawing water? Have any of you come to this place today by other means than by walking? If so, **you**, also, are in violation of the Sabbath law. And worse, I suspect.

Do any of you have a blemish of the skin? Then you must leave this space of sacred worship? Have any of you eaten meat with a cream sauce? Have any of you eaten pork? Have you ever touched the skin of a dead swine? Or been intoxicated? Do any of you have piercings or tattoos in your body? If you

are a woman and have not observed ritual cleansing since your most recent time of bleeding, you must remove yourself. And if anyone here has as much as brushed against your clothing during the days of your impurity, they must also leave. As for you men: Have any of you married someone who was not a virgin? You are likely all of you unclean, or sinful, or unrighteous and unfit to serve God in this place!

As for the case of the people of God versus this man Jesus, we would also pursue those who dare claim to be his followers.

If I were to bring charges against any of **you** of being a follower of this Jesus, would this court actually be able to gather enough evidence to **convict you**? Is there anything about any of you that remotely resembles Jesus?

We already know of your sad violations of the sacred law of Moses- the original Ten Commandments plus many the other 600 or so additions we have made through the years? What? Jesus never actually said anything about those?. Oh- just the one- Thou shalt love the Lord thy God and your neighbor as yourself? Just knowing that makes you his follower, doesn’t it?

What of your faith, your beliefs? What of the dogma and doctrine he requires of his following?

Do you believe in the holy, universal Christian church? Oh? He never said anything about believing in a church? What of the Holy Trinity? Oh, really? The concept didn’t exist during his lifetime? What of the virgin birth? Oh, really? He never claimed it for himself.

Well, do you believe in the inspiration of Holy Scripture? You’re kidding, right? That concept was never even considered important until nearly **1900 years after his death**? How about

the literal interpretation of Holy Scripture? Is that not a statement of Jesus' own, personal faith? No? Are not the words of God inerrant, perfect, eternally true and unchangeable? ... God is **still speaking? Blasphemy!**

If being a follower of Jesus is not about law and order and cleanliness and decency and confessing absolute statements of belief, what **does** it take to be his follower, I ask you?

It's how you live your **life**? Preposterous! That's what our **laws** are for- living life! That's what our courts are for! What do you mean it's supposed to be about what's inside our hearts, the way we view life? That's terribly relativist! It's unenforceable! It's anarchy! Is that what following Jesus is about? Anarchy? No absolutes?

Oh- it means **really** following him- doing the things he did? Learning to think and reason like him, to do the things he has done?

Very well, then. You will be judged here and now- not by me, but by yourselves, based on how closely **you** have followed the accused- how closely your actions are to his. Let's see if there is enough evidence to convict you now of being his followers.

Who here is guilty of mixing up a little mud poultice on the Sabbath and anointing some sightless person's eyes? No one? Jesus did that; do you?

Do you commiserate with tax collectors and thieves? Do you participate in wild parties where there is music, feasting, and drinking wine? Again, Jesus is well known for doing such things. Do any of you assume that you have the authority to forgive others?

Do any of you hang out with the great unwashed of this world- the poorest of the poor- the widows, the orphans, the outcasts, the aliens in your

land? Can I discover that any of you have ever shared your food with the hungry? (Oh, yes, the evidence is right in front of me.)

Well, have you even once offered someone a clean bed and a place to sleep? Oh, just last night? All right, then. In that sense you may in some way resemble this Jesus.

Well, what else have you done? Have you confronted the political powers of the world, the economic powers, the religious powers?

What have you done to help heal the sick? Comfort the grieving? The dying? Have you visited them? Have you held a hand? Offered a hug? Offered a prayer? Prepared a meal? Offered words of encouragement? -Listened to someone's pain, heard their story? -Told your own story? -Shared a tear with someone?

If you have actually done any of these things, then there **might** be enough evidence to convict you of being one of his followers.

But wait. One of our officers has returned. He followed the blind man when he left here a few minutes ago. Let me see your report. "Yada, yada, yada..."

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

Judgment? "So that those who **do** see may become blind." Jesus can't be equating good religious people like you and me with those who are blind! **We** see better than anyone! Surely it is Jesus who is still on trial in this world, not us. Surely.... It can't be people like us!

John Herman