

“Living Passionately”
John 9:1-39
March 19, 2023

I think most of the great things that happen in our world involve passion. The driving force behind all great music, literature, art, drama, architecture, and even athletics is passion. Passion propels athletes to break records. Passion pushes scientists to discover new cures for diseases. Passion encourages people to keep going when everyone around them has given up. God wants us to love Him with passion and to live a life of passion. Our God is passionate and He created us to be passionate people.

Today in our Gospel lesson we see the passion Jesus has for people – that all people may know Him and the power of His love. Jesus is walking along a road with His disciples as they pass by a man who was blind. Upon seeing this man, it appears that the disciples just want to discuss his situation with Jesus. In verse 2 they ask Jesus, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Now this was not necessarily an unusual question. It was a very common belief back then that if someone was born with a disability, it was a punishment from God. Sometimes people still think that way today. “If I’m suffering, it must be for some sin I committed.” But not every ailment or form of suffering is caused by a specific sin. We don’t know why this man was born blind, but we do know that God allowed his blindness in this case so that the works of God would shine through this man. In other words, when Jesus sees the man, He sees something to do, not just discuss. Even though the man didn’t ask for healing, Jesus has a passion to do something that will not only touch this man’s life, but the lives of many people.

Obviously the man in our Gospel lesson was physically blind, but he was also blind in another way. After explaining to His disciples that neither the man nor his parents had sinned that caused the blindness, Jesus took some dust from the ground, moistened it with saliva, and put it

on the man's eyes. Jesus then sends the man to wash in the pool of Siloam and he comes back seeing. Physically he moved from darkness into light. Yet, when he received his physical sight, he also received spiritual sight, meaning he moved from unbelief to faith in Jesus and he worshipped Him.

What's amazing is that throughout this story we see the faith of this man grow. For example, as soon as the man was healed he told his neighbors in verse 11 that Jesus was simply "a man," who healed Him. But when asked by the Pharisees, the religious leaders in the land, how he received his sight, he referred to Jesus in verse 17 as "a prophet." Then when the Pharisees refused to believe that Jesus did this miracle, the man said that Jesus had to be "one who was sent by God," because who else could open the eyes of a blind man. Finally, when Jesus stood before this man, after he had been thrown out of the temple by the Pharisees, he recognized Jesus – not just as a man or a prophet – but with His new eyes of faith, he saw Him as the very Son of God and he worshipped Him. Now, both physically and spiritually, the man could see.

But this man was not the only blind person in this story. The Pharisees were also blind. They weren't physically blind, but they were spiritually blind and didn't even realize it. What's interesting is that as the healed man's faith grew, after receiving his physical sight, the unbelief of the Pharisees grew. First, the Pharisees argued in verse 16 that Jesus broke one of the laws of the Sabbath by supposedly "working" on that day in healing the blind man saying, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." Then, in verse 18 they started doubting whether the miracle actually happened at all. Finally, by asserting that Jesus couldn't have been from God and saying in verse 24, "We know that this man Jesus is a sinner," the Pharisees moved further and further into the darkness of unbelief.

At the end of this story some Pharisees asked Jesus, “Are we also blind?” And perhaps that’s a question we ought to be asking ourselves. Do we see this world with the eyes of Christ and have a passion for others and wonder what we can do for them or do we see this world with the eyes of the Pharisees and wonder what we can do for ourselves? There’s a lot of darkness in our world that I’m sure we all see. This is the time of the year as we approach our Easter celebration that many national magazines and newspapers will run articles questioning whether the resurrection of Jesus actually happened. There will even be television shows with many so called “scholars” who will argue that it never happened, that the resurrection was just a story that was passed down from one generation of Christians to the next.

The darkness of unbelief is all around us and while we were all born spiritually blind like the man and the Pharisees in our text as a result of the sin we inherited from our parents, that goes all the way back to Adam and Eve, Jesus had such a passion for us that He was not going to allow our spiritual blindness to drive us away from God forever. Just as Jesus intervened in the life of a man in this text, so Jesus has intervened in our lives. He has come to all of us and opened the eyes of our soul. He didn’t use mud, but for many of us Jesus opened the eyes of our souls when He came to us in baptism. There, through water and the Word of God, Jesus gave us eyes of faith, so that we could see Him and believe all things according to His Word. But for some of you, Jesus gave sight to your soul in a different way. He came to you through His Word, as you heard it read, taught, or preached, and over the years Jesus then opened your eyes with the message of the Gospel. “I forgive you,” Jesus said. “I died for you. You are my child and I will be your God forever.”

In a few weeks we will be reminded again that our spiritual sight came at a great cost, as we remember the darkness of Good Friday in which Jesus died. But on Easter morning the shining

angels announced that Jesus was alive and victorious over the darkness of sin and death.

Therefore, being healed like the man in our Gospel lesson, we too worship Jesus.

John 9 is about the joy and hope we can experience when we see the world with eyes of faith. However, if we view Easter only with physical eyes, it will mean only a long weekend off from work or school, or maybe a new Spring outfit, or the fun of coloring eggs with children, and eating jelly beans and chocolate bunnies. If we view Easter with intellectual eyes, we will simply be reminded that the Christian world commemorates Christ's rising from the dead after 3 days in the tomb almost 2000 years ago. But if we see Easter with spiritual eyes of faith, we can transform lives. Here's what I mean. Several years ago there was a missionary in Africa who needed some help in working with the people in the local villages by fixing their homes and farming their land. So a 21 year-old man from the missionary's home church came to Africa to help. He rode a motorcycle from village to village helping people plant gardens, fixing their homes, caring for their wounds, and playing with their children. Everyone loved him, but after serving the people for 8 months he fell ill with a tropical fever. The people prayed and prayed that he would get better, but he died.

About a year later the missionary led a group of new workers to a remote village where he thought no one had ever gone to share the Gospel of Jesus. When the missionary met with the people he said, "We have come to tell you about a man who loves you and died for you so you could live." And the people said, "Yes, we've met this man." And the missionary said, "We've come to tell you about Jesus, who came to bind up your wounds and heal you." And again the people said, "Yes, he's been to this village." "I don't think you understand," said the missionary, "we've come to tell you about Jesus who came to save you." And again the people said, "We know Jesus, he rode a

motorcycle in this village, but died about a year ago.” That night, as the missionary prepared to go to bed, he got down on his knees and prayed, “Dear Lord, no one has ever mistaken me for Jesus.”

The people in that village saw Jesus in the life of that young man. Do you see Jesus in people around you? Do people see Jesus in you? Jesus lives in us, He is the light of the world. See it, believe it, live it, be passionate about it, and share it, so others may see Jesus before it's too late.