

“Here’s Mud in Your Eye!” John 9:1-41

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You may have heard the strange little phrase, “Here’s mud in your eye!” You’d think that wishing someone would have mud in their eye would be wishing a bad thing for them. After all, who wants mud in their eye? But the phrase has come to be used as a toast among people who are drinking together. It actually means something like, “Cheers,” or “God bless you!” In fact, the origin of the phrase goes all the way back to the 9th chapter of John’s gospel, which is this morning’s text. I think it’s important for you to hear the whole story, so we’ve asked some folks to help read it for us.

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸The 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?” ⁹Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He 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.” ¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and

opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then 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." ¹⁶Some 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. ¹⁷So 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." ¹⁸The 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 ¹⁹and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;²¹but 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." ²²His 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. ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." ²⁴So 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." ²⁵He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He 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?" ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

³⁹Jesus 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." ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains. (John 9:1-41)

This story raises some important questions that we still wrestle with today. One of them is found in the first two verses. *As (Jesus) walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.* ²*His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"* ³*Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.* (John 9:1-3)

The question about the origin of suffering is one that has been asked since ancient times. And to be blind in ancient times meant terrible suffering. You couldn't work or marry, so you were reduced to sitting in busy places begging for money. It was pretty awful, and to make matters worse, the Jewish people of Jesus' time believed that there was a direct, one-to-one correlation between sin and suffering. If you sin, you will suffer. Therefore, if you are suffering, you must have sinned.

In this case, since the man was born blind, the disciples allow that the man himself may not have sinned, but maybe his parents did! Certainly someone must have done something wrong to cause his suffering! Some of you may feel that way about your own misfortune or suffering- that you must have done something wrong to cause the kind of hurt you are

experiencing. Well, Jesus has some good news for you! He doesn't believe in karma! He makes it clear that this man's suffering (and probably your suffering) are not the result of anyone's sin! And, that God's power and compassion can be revealed even in the midst of suffering! God is not angry with the blind man, or with you! He wants to bring healing to your situation, as he did for the blind man, who after Jesus put mud in his eyes (There it is!), was healed!

The man's neighbors are dumbfounded by this. They even wonder if it's the same man who had always been blind. They ask him about his healing, and he says that Jesus put mud on his eyes and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam and he was healed. This is his first witness or testimony about Jesus. It is a simple, honest account of what happened to him. We'll see how his witness deepens through the story.

His neighbors take him to the Pharisees, the experts in religious matters. Oh yeah. John mentions that the healing had taken place on the Sabbath, a violation of Sabbath law. So naturally, the Pharisees are skeptical about the man's healing. They debate if a Sabbath-breaker could be used by God to heal! Finally, they ask the man for his opinion about Jesus. Finding some courage, the man says, "He is a prophet." (John 9:17)

The Pharisees are not amused. They take a new tack. Maybe the man wasn't really blind to start with! So they call in his parents for questioning. (You never really stop being a parent, do you?) But the parents want nothing to do with the questions of the Pharisees. They will only state that, yes, their son was born blind. They are afraid to say anything else, because followers of Jesus were being thrown out of the synagogue. That was tantamount to being shunned by society. No one would buy anything from them or sell anything to them, and they could no longer attend the synagogue. They were rightfully afraid. "*He is of age; ask him!*" they say. (John 9:23)

So the Pharisees return to the formerly blind man, saying "*Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.*"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."* (John 9:24b-25) The man's testimony is rock solid. He can't speak to their theological issues, but he knows that it was Jesus who healed him. After further questioning, he goes on the offensive! This time he offers a compelling, logical argument. God doesn't listen to sinners. No one has ever restored sight to someone born blind, until Jesus did it. Therefore, Jesus can't be a sinner because God is listening to him! The man's testimony has progressed from "Jesus is a healer" to "Jesus is a prophet" to "Jesus has no sin!"

I love what happens next. Jesus seeks out the man, who was probably pretty shaken about being thrown out of the synagogue.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. (John 9:35-38)

The phrase "Son of Man" comes from the Old Testament and refers to the Messiah. The formerly blind man believes that Jesus is the Son of Man and worships Jesus, who allows him to do so. This would have been blasphemous, were Jesus not God in the flesh! Jesus continues to instruct his new follower, *³⁹Jesus 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." ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains. (John 9:39-41)*

The healing of the blind man is a demonstration of Jesus' claim to be the light of the world! He gave light to the blind man's world. Now he is showing the spiritual application of it. Those who are confident of their own status before God, shouldn't be! They are blinded by their egos. But those

who are aware of their sinfulness are seeing things as they really are; Those who are repentant and honest about their sin will not experience God's judgment.

This is a recurring theme in Jesus' teaching. He hated self-righteousness and hypocrisy whenever he encountered it and didn't hesitate to say so.

In The Magician's Nephew, part of C.S. Lewis' "The Chronicles of Narnia" series- and if you haven't read these books, you really should! They are available in our church library. The Magician's Nephew looks back to the creation of Narnia by the lion, Aslan, who is a Christ-figure in the books. Aslan sings the world of Narnia into being, as creatures worship him. But one character in the story who is observing the wonder of creation is unmoved- Uncle Andrew.

"When the great moment came and the Beasts spoke, (Uncle Andrew) missed the whole point, for a rather interesting reason. When the Lion had first begun singing, long ago when it was still quite dark, he had realized that the noise was a song. And he had disliked the song very much. It made him think and feel things he did not want to think and feel.

Then, when the sun rose and he saw that the singer was a Lion ("only a lion," as he said to himself) he tried his hardest to make himself believe that it wasn't singing and never had been singing; only roaring as

any lion might in a zoo in our own world. Of course it can't really have been singing, he thought, I must have imagined it. I've been letting my nerves get out of order. Who ever heard of a lion singing?

And the longer and more beautifully the Lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he could hear nothing but roaring. Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed. Uncle Andrew did. He soon did hear nothing but roaring in Aslan's song. Soon he couldn't have heard anything else even if he had wanted to."

There are some people who don't believe in Jesus, who don't follow him, because of honest questions and doubts. I hope that one day they will be able to move past those questions and doubts and encounter Jesus. But there are other people who are more like Uncle Andrew. They have heard the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ, and it resonates with them. But they have a vague sense that responding to the Good News would be costly to them in some way, and they work hard to convince themselves that it isn't really Good News, or that Jesus isn't who he claimed to be, or that a good God can't possibly exist in a world of suffering, or...whatever.

That was the plight of the Pharisees. They witnessed miracle after miracle demonstrating Jesus' divine nature, but refused to see what was

literally right in front of them, because it would have been too costly to them. They would have lost their positions of power, and they would have had to jettison their salvation-by-good-works theology and embrace God's grace for all people.

If you see yourself in the Pharisees or in Uncle Andrew, please understand that the longer you willingly turn yourself from Jesus, the harder it will become to turn back to him. Why not turn to him today? He can help you to see things more clearly as he did for the blind man! Here's mud in your eye!