

Background Information

John 9 in the context of John

Written by Beth Tobin

The story of the man born blind being healed in John 9 gives us a view into the world behind the biblical text. The Pharisees learn Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath by using mud and spit and are torn about who Jesus is. — How can a sinner perform such signs? (v. 16) They did not believe that the man was born blind until they call his parents to testify. His parents acknowledged their son and that he was born blind, but they are afraid to acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah because they were afraid “the Jews” would put them out of the synagogue. (9:21-22) This is symbolic of a clash that must have occurred between the Johannine Community and their local synagogue. Upon being interrogated again, the man with restored sight claims, “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” (v. 33) The leaders then drove him out of the synagogue just as the followers of Christ behind the biblical text were driven out their synagogue.

Jesus is the light to the darkness of the world which in this case is represented by the Pharisees. The purpose of Jesus’ signs were so that “you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” (20:31) Each sign is meant to bring glory to God. To believe in Jesus is to have eternal life now and in the future.

The seven signs in John are used to teach beginning faith through sensory experiences. Along the way people have to decide if they are going to believe or not. For believers, faith then grows to be relational. The story of the Good Shepherd is an example of relational faith and how much Jesus, the shepherd, cares for us, the sheep. His Farewell Discourse repeatedly assures the disciples of his continued relationship with them, even after his departure, through the Advocate — the Holy Spirit. But the most touching relationship story to me is one I heard ELCA Presiding Bishop Eaton share with us when she visited PLU in the fall of 2014. In the garden, it was when Jesus said Mary’s name, that she recognized him. (20:16) “The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.....and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.” (10:3-4) The more we study God’s Word the more we know the voice of God.

Like the man with restored sight, Jesus restores our sight and as we grow in our relationship with God, helps us to see with new eyes — the eyes of Christ.