

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Who in this entire world would not have compassion for the central character of this ninth chapter of John's Gospel?

A blind man.

That way from birth.

Then, suddenly healed.

A cause for joy, but no one shares in his joy.

His neighbors quibble.

His parents are afraid.

And, he is interrogated by the religious establishment of the day, the Pharisees.....this not just once, but twice.

Finally he is reviled for his beliefs about Jesus by these same Pharisees, and he is cast out of their midst and out of their building. Excommunicated.

What a pitiable story, a story that Hollywood could embellish and ruin as it has recently with Noah, Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

But, this central character, this blind man healed, shows extraordinary compassion to those who would not believe what Jesus had done for him. Those who formerly knew him as a blind man were repeatedly saying, "Isn't this the blind beggar? Is this him? Maybe this man is just someone who looks like him?" And the text says that the healed man kept telling his neighbors, "I am he. I am he."

Apparently he's not convincing his neighbors, for these neighbors think that a higher council might have some say in the matter. His neighbors bring him before an ensemble of Pharisees. Notice, those neighbors who questioned this miracle don't bring the Pharisees to the man, rather the man is led to the Pharisees. The man goes, almost forcibly. The man is interrogated and answers all the questions of the Pharisees, albeit, unsatisfactorily. His answers even divide the assembly. Some of the Pharisees thought Jesus was a sinner, while others thought Him without sin.

That division however was resolved by the second questioning of this man. For before the second questioning, the Pharisees met behind closed doors.....as do all groups which do not want their deeds to be known in the light of day. They crossed the aisle, played politics, opined that Jesus was a sinner and they said that the once-upon-a-time-blind-man had better give his assent to their opinion (v. 24).

But, the healed man won't assent! He keeps referring to his **former** blindness; that he **now** sees; and that the One who **healed** him is both a prophet and from God (vv. 17, 33). The healed man wants to know how come this group of learned men, the Pharisees, is so against Jesus, the prophet from God? The healed man wonders, "Do they really see?"

So, what kind of compassion does this man have toward his judges, the Council of Pharisees? The text says that the man was amazed at them. Amazed in a sad, piteous way. For here was a

group of highly educated men, laymen and priests, all who had taken vows of tithing and purity of life, and as a group was to know the texts from which their vows were formed and supported. They claimed to be disciples of Moses, and yet they seemed to know little if anything of what Moses actually taught. Maybe they weren't reading Moses anymore. Maybe they thought they knew it all, no need to learn more.

Truly, the Pharisees were, as we like to say, *clueless*. They were clueless as to the real content of the Scriptures and clueless as to the Person of the Son of God. They would not listen to an ordinary man who was interpreting his cure and the Scriptures, rightly, all through Christ-colored glasses. This now seeing-man certainly had a knowledge of the Bible. This common man told these learned men that he could recall "no text of the Bible where a person born blind was given sight." Then he speaks a most perfect cut into the heart of these hard-hearted men: "If this man [Jesus] were not from God, He could do nothing."

That was it. How dare a man who had taken no vows tell those who were superior how to interpret the Bible. How dare a man like this teach those who had studied Scripture that Jesus was a prophet sent from God. This beggarly, vagrant of a man spoke for Christ. For that reason, he must be put out of their midst. This man could be no disciple of theirs.

Jesus however, is not ashamed to have this man be His disciple. Jesus is not ashamed of the blind or of the lame or of the deaf. He is not ashamed of a honky man or of a Hispanic woman. His heart is only grieved when men will not repent and believe that He is the Light of the World.

Early in this reading when Jesus passes near to this blind man and hears the question of His disciples about the cause of this man's blindness, Jesus must open his mouth. **It does not matter who sinned. Yes, this man is a sinner. Yes, his parents conceived him in sin. And for these reasons I am the Light of the World. I have come not just to open eyes shut with blindness, but to open hearts shut in the darkness of sin.**

Jesus' actions to the blind man seem almost unsanitary and uncompassionate as He shows Himself the Light of the World.

Like a child, Jesus spits on the dirt.

Then He makes mud from the mixture.

Then the Light of the World packs the spittle on the man's already blinded eyes.

Then Jesus tells the blind man to find his way through rugged, hilly Jerusalem to the Pool of Siloam.

Why can't Jesus just say a word or touch him to heal him? Why all this rigamarole?

Many people ask the same thing of Holy Baptism. Can't our sins be forgiven by just the reading of the Bible? Sure. But our Lord uses other means of evangelizing, of gospelizing, of forgiving sins. Our Lord has commanded: Take water.....tap water or dirty river water it doesn't matter; apply water....over the whole body or on the forehead, it doesn't matter; say the words (they DO matter!) "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." And yes, by this, water plus the Word, your sins are forgiven.

Another means of evangelizing, of gospelizing. Our Lord has commanded: Take bread. Take wine. It is what He commands. Use the words our Lord gives--My body; My blood. Eat the bread now His Body; drink the wine now His blood. Go in peace; go forgiven.

Rigamarole? No. No more so than when Jesus rubs spittle into a blind man's eyes after the blind man had heard the voice of Jesus say, "I am the Light of the World." Rigamarole? No. No more so than when Jesus tells the blind man to find his way to the Pool of Siloam.

Siloam was a pool of simple water. A pool created when a tunnel was dug to an outside-of-Jerusalem source of water. "Go wash there" says Jesus. The man does. The man sees.

What happens at our baptismal font? What happens when your pastor speaks the word of Christ mixed with the simple water from the small pool of water in our bowls? **Nothing short of a miracle.** With Christ's words, blind, helpless people, lost in their sin, become seeing, faith-filled people. By the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, that Spirit by whom God pours out on us richly, many, old men, young women, even infants, are made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7).

Wonder of wonders! Miracle of miracles! At fonts, something greater than physical blindness is washed away. Sin is washed away. Faith is created. Forgiveness is granted. The Word of Christ does it. That is why we Lutherans use water with the Words *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost*. Jesus Himself has promised that where these words are, disciples are made. The Gospel is at work at baptismal fonts! It is, as Luther taught, "a life-giving water."

Yet still is our Lord Jesus not done evangelizing his newest student. Jesus carries on catechesis the next day with this man. The text says that Good Shepherd Jesus seeks this sheep of His pasture because Jesus had heard that this man had been excommunicated from the synagogue (v. 35). A simple catechetical question is asked the man: **Do you believe in the Son of God?** The man knows he has much to learn. Having never seen Jesus he asks Jesus, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus reveals Himself. The man confesses his faith. His faith cannot be restrained. He cannot hold his peace. He bows before Jesus, in the presence of Pharisees. Not only has he been given the gift of physical sight, but also the gift of sight in his heart, his soul and his mind. He knows his sin. He knows his Savior. He bears fruit in the Light of Jesus' love.

Let it be: that my eyes are ever before the Lord; that I gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, for the Lord has turned my darkness into light.

O come let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

IJN. Amen.