

“One thing I do know”

John 9

Wayne Eberly

April 3, 2022

There is a verse in our passage of scripture from John 9 that is not tucked in, it is not snuck in, it is definitely not squeezed in...no, this verse in our passage of scripture from John 9, it is more like this verse is embedded in this story of the encounter between Jesus and a man born blind. The verse simply cannot be argued with, though in this case the religious leaders do exactly that. But what is proclaimed in this verse is so obviously real, and backed by such undisputable evidence, that there is really nothing anyone can say to contradict the statement. Maybe that is why this one verse from John 9 is truly an amazing verse. (Wink! Wink!) Called to give account of what happened to him on that day so long ago, the man in John 9 simply says, “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see.” (John 9:25) John chapter nine tells us the story of a man who has nothing less than an amazing testimony. (Wink! Wink!) If you are not reading along, I want you to know that in my notes, every time I have said the word “Amazing” I have made a note to myself that says, “Wink! Wink!” You see, the word Amazing (wink, wink) has its own unique relationship to this man who proclaims so boldly and so confidently, “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see.” We will get to the wonderful connection between the man in John 9 and the word Amazing a bit later.

For now, one of the amazing (wink, wink) aspects of this story is that this is not only the record of one man who was blind and becomes able to see, this chapter is also intended as an invitation for all people who are blind to receive the gift of seeing, the gift of sight. As the story nears its conclusion Jesus says something of great importance related to this man who was blind and now can see. Jesus says that the reason he, Jesus, came into the world was so that the blind would be able to see. Jesus also tells us

the flip side of things in that he also came so that those who see will realize they are blind. I will leave you to consider what that second part of his statement might mean, because this morning I want to make sure we all realize this statement about the blind becoming able to see has been before us since the first verses of the Gospel of John.

The theme of light and darkness is present all throughout the Gospel of John. In John 1:4 we read that the Word of God brought life, and that life was the light of all people. But even though the true light, who we realize as we read the gospel account is none other than Jesus, even though the true light, Jesus, was in the world, the world did not recognize him. In other words, the world was blind. The true light shined into the world, but the world was blind. The world did not receive Jesus. But those who did receive Jesus, those whose eyes were opened so they could see the true light, they became children of God.

So it is that as the blind man becomes able to see, a physical act that is truly miraculous, so also all people are invited to become able to see, to experience a spiritual act that is no less miraculous than the physical act. We are invited, if not compelled to receive the gift of sight, to move from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight, meaning to see Jesus as he truly is, God's Beloved Son and the Savior of the world. I hope our eyes are opened so that we can say the exact same thing this man has said with such conviction and such confidence, "One thing I do know. I was blind, we were blind but now I see." When we can say that with the blind man, it is so amazing. (Wink! Wink!)

This beautiful story also helps us see something else of great importance. The story begins when Jesus sees this man, this man of whom we are told was blind from birth. His blindness leads to a question from the disciples of Jesus. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" We will learn from this story that in this situation, it is the disciples of Jesus who are blind. They think the blindness of the man is due to sin, whether sin of the parents or sin of the man. I am guessing many of us here today

find that our hearts sink when we hear this kind of thinking. Whether you call blindness a handicap, a disability, a physical challenge, the disciples blindly attribute the blindness to sin. How many have found themselves crippled by this type of thinking. With all limitations, with all disabilities, with all challenges, with all handicaps, what a crippling blow that some distorted form of thinking attributes it to sin. They did something wrong. He did something wrong. Which is not very far from saying, “They deserved it.” Jesus definitively says sin is not the cause. Instead, Jesus encourages all of us, when we encounter any form of disability or uniqueness or limitation or loss, Jesus encourages us to allow our eyes to be opened, to see how God’s glory will be displayed even, or maybe especially, through the very limitation or loss that seems so crippling.

At least the blindness of the disciples comes in a question form, “Who sinned?” When the religious leaders meet the blind man they declare, “You were steeped in sin at birth.” The religious leaders think they can see, but they are blind. May we embrace this story in a way that allows us to look at the challenges and limitations and losses and disappointments of life as yet one more way God is at work in God’s mysterious and marvelous ways. When we do, we can join the man in our story this morning in saying, “I was blind but now I see.”

These verses also reveal that the way the Pharisees see the Sabbath is actually a cause of blindness for them. The Pharisee’s desire to protect and preserve the Sabbath is so all-consuming that it blinds them. We saw this in John 5 when a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight was healed by Jesus and commanded to take up his mat and walk. In their blindness all the Pharisees could see was that the Sabbath commandment which prohibited carrying a mat had been broken. What they could not see, or refused to see, was that a man whose body had been broken nearly four decades had been made well. Now in John 9, the blind man who can see has also received his miracle on the Sabbath. Same thing. Same blindness. All they can say about Jesus is, “This man is not from

God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” Might our eyes be opened through these many Sabbath episodes. May we see the Sabbath as a day to honor God, symbolic of our desire to honor God with every day and every moment and every thought and every action. When we recognize the Sabbath as a gift from God to be used for the glory of God, we can say with the man in John 9, “I was blind, but now I see.”

And please, Lord, let us see how every act of healing, every act of wholeness, every act of restoration, every act of renewal, comes directly from you. I just called your attention to the man who walked after being an invalid for thirty-eight years. Caught in the act of carrying his mat on the Sabbath, the man responds to the question of the Pharisees, “Who is this fellow who healed you and told you to pick up your mat and walk?” Unbelievably, the man’s answer to this question from the religious leaders is, “I don’t know.” He doesn’t know? That man might have been able to finally walk, but he could not see. He was blind. Compare him to our friend in John 9. When he is asked, “How then were your eyes opened?”, he tells it like he sees it. “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes.” The man minces no words. Who opened my eyes? Jesus. The man they call Jesus. When we can look at every good blessing and every gift in our lives and answer just as clearly, “Who did it?” When we can say, “The man they call Jesus”, then we can say with the man in John 9, “I was blind, but now I see.” Amazing! Amazing I tell you. This whole chapter, but especially the statement, “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”, this is all simply amazing. Wink! Wink! Wink!

There was a man named John Newton who could see. John Newton could see just fine. One thing John Newton could see, and one thing he could see so clearly, was that there was a lot of money to be made in trading slaves. He saw that clearly. From the time he started sailing with his father’s ships when he was only eleven years old, John Newton saw that there was a lot of money to be made in trading slaves. When he became captain of his own ship, John Newton really saw just how much money there was to be

made in trading slaves. “He sailed the seas capturing, selling and transporting black slaves to the plantations in the West Indies and America.”<sup>1</sup> John Newton saw that he could make large amounts of money by subjecting black slaves to a cruel and vicious way of life.

And then one stormy night on the seas, when the waves threatened to capsize the boat and end his life, John Newton began reading a book about Jesus Christ. “The message of that book and the frightening experience at sea were used by the Holy Spirit to sow the seeds of Newton’s eventual conversion and personal acceptance of Christ as his Savior.”<sup>2</sup> Over time Newton saw the sinfulness of slavery, gave up trading slaves, and became a crusader against slavery.

“In a small cemetery of a parish churchyard in Olney, England, stands a granite tombstone with the following inscription: ‘John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and Libertine, a servant of slavers in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the Faith he had long labored to destroy.’ This fitting testimonial, written by Newton himself prior to his death, describes aptly the unusual and colorful life of this man, one of the great evangelical preachers of the eighteenth century.”<sup>3</sup> Newton is also well known for a line he borrowed from John chapter nine, our passage of scripture this morning. In verse one of one of the most well-known and beloved hymns of the English language, John Newton wrote, “I once was blind, but now I see.” Oh, John Newton could always see. But until he found Jesus Christ, John Newton was blind. Only in Jesus Christ, was John Newton able to truly see. Using John 9 as a cornerstone of his faith, John Newton wrote the hymn, “Amazing Grace.”

John nine is a chapter that clearly portrays both physical blindness and spiritual blindness. And because of that, we are able

---

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth W. Osbeck, 101 Hymn Stories, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Osbeck, p 29.

<sup>3</sup> Osbeck, p. 28.

to wag our finger in front of the newly opened eyes of this wonderful blind man who can now see and say to him, ‘No!’ No? What do we mean telling this blind man who can now see, ‘No!’? Well, the man says, ‘One thing I do know, I was blind but now I see.’ When we hear him say, ‘One thing I know’, we say ‘No! No!’ We say no because there is more than one thing this story teaches us. There is more than one thing this story reveals to us. There is more than one thing the man himself discovers. And thanks be to God there is more than one thing this man ends up knowing. ‘One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see.’ Mr. blind man, get ready to know something else, beyond the one thing you do know.

This story would not be complete without what happens to the man who claims so confidently that he knows one thing. His physical blindness is gone. He can see. And then Jesus finds this man who was blind but can now see. When he finds him, Jesus asks, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ Who is he, sir?’ the man asked Jesus. Jesus said, ‘You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.’ Then the man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped Jesus. Now he knows two things. He was blind but now he can see. And he knows who Jesus is. And he worships Jesus. His spiritual eyes are opened. Amazing. Amazing. Wink, wink, wink. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

When our spiritual eyes are opened, we see that all of life is a gift from God. When our spiritual eyes are opened, when we see Jesus face to face, when we see Jesus for who he is, God’s Beloved Son, the Savior of the world, my Lord, my God, my Savior, when we see Jesus, we can say with our dear friend in John nine. ‘One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!’

As we prepare to come to the Lord’s Table, let us remember two disciples who were on their way to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection. Jesus, risen from the dead, met them and walked with them. But their eyes were kept from seeing him, kept from

recognizing him. They were blind in terms of knowing it was Jesus who walked and talked with them. After a long and enlightening conversation, they came to their stopping point and Jesus made as if he would keep going. But they urged him to stay with them. Listen to what Luke tells us in the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of his gospel. “When he was at table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” (Luke 24:30 31) In the breaking of the bread their eyes were opened. They were blind, but when the bread was broken, they were able to see.

A woman named Fanny Crosby wrote many hymns of praise. Two of those hymns in our own hymnbook. One says, “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. O what a foretaste of glory divine. Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of his Spirit, washed in his blood. This is my story; this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long; this is my story; this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.”

In another she writes, “To God be the glory; great things he has done! So loved he the world that he gave us his Son, who yielded his life an atonement for sin, and opened the life gate that all may go in. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord; let the earth hear his voice! Praise the Lord, praise the Lord; let the people rejoice. O come to the Father through Jesus the Son, and give him the glory great things he has done!”

Fanny Crosby, who could see so clearly who Jesus was, was blind. Physically. She was blind from birth. At one point she said something that is really quite amazing. “If I had a choice, I would still choose to remain blind...for when I die, the first face I will ever see will be the face of my blessed Savior.” Well, for you and me, we have a similar experience. When our spiritual blindness ends, when our eyes are opened, when we see with new and spiritual eyes, guess whose face is the first face we see. That face is the face of Jesus, our blessed Savior. Amazing. Amazing. Amazing grace. We were blind, but now we see. Thanks be to God.

