

## Open our eyes, Lord

John 9:1-41

March 11, 2007

(Read John 9:1-34)

Did you see the eclipse last Sunday, the lunar eclipse? I saw it as I was driving east on Highway 218 toward the church, the moon suspended low in the eastern sky, almost all of its surface covered by the earth's shadow, only a thin crescent of the full moon's reflected light still visible. It was a remarkable sight! It was a remarkable sight! Do you realize what a privilege it is to see, to see anything at all?

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*I can see! I can see the gleaming copper of the organ pipes. I can see the brilliant red and deep blue and glowing white of the figures set in stained glass at the rear of the sanctuary. And I can see you! I can see Donny's gray sweatshirt and Gina's colorful jacket. I can see your faces and read your expressions. I thank God every day that I can see because there was a time when I could not. You see, I was born blind.*

*You cannot imagine what it is like to be blind. You can pretend, you can close your eyes, but it's not the same. You can open your eyes again, at any moment, and you will be able to see. You have no idea what it is like to know that you will never see!*

*And even when your eyes are closed, the images of all that you have seen keep running through your mind. Even with your eyes closed, you can still see with your imagination. But when you are blind, there are no images in your mind. When you are born blind, even your imagination sees nothing!*

*You have no idea what it is like to be blind, to have no images enlivening your imagination, to have no sensory experience of color and depth, light and shadow, form and movement. When I was blind, I experienced life in four dimensions instead of five. I could touch and taste, hear and smell, but I could not see. It's like the difference between seeing a photograph of a person's face and seeing the face itself. What you see in the photograph is accurate as far as it goes, but it shows only a flat image frozen in time. It can never give you the full picture, a full perception of that face.*

*When I was blind I could smell the flowers and feel the delicate softness of their petals, but I could never have imagined the beauty of the pale yellow streaks radiating from the center of lavender irises.*

*When I was blind, I could smell the sharp tang of a fish just removed from the water and run my fingers along its slippery sides and taste its sweet flesh, but I could never have imagined the beauty of the subtle pink highlights along the flank of a rainbow trout.*

*When I was blind, I could hear the distress and anguish and loneliness and fear in your voice, but I could never see the tears gathering in the corner of your eye and running down your cheek, and it is seeing those tears that breaks my heart and draws me to you.*

*Now I can see! Jesus did it.*

*I was sitting at the side of the road one day, begging as I always did. I heard the sound of footsteps approaching and the sounds of a group of men in conversation. Then the footsteps and the conversation stopped and one of the men came near me and rubbed mud on my eyes and told me to go and wash my face in the pool of Siloam. I did as he told me. I went to the pool and washed my face, and when I lifted my face from the pool ... I could see!*

*Boy, was everybody surprised! All the neighbors and the people who had passed me by so many times on their way to the market or the Temple wanted to know if it was really me or somebody else who just looked like me. They couldn't believe it was me because stuff like this just doesn't happen! Have you ever seen something like this happen? Have you ever seen someone give sight to a person born blind? None of them had seen anything like this before.*

*They decided they needed to take me to the Pharisees. They thought if anybody could, the Pharisees might be able to explain this most strange and wonderful happening. In any case, they thought the Pharisees would want to know about it! As for me, this was a new experience. I had never talked with a Pharisee before.*

*The Pharisees asked me questions and kept asking me questions: What happened? How did it happen? Who did it? What did I think about him? I told them the truth. I told them what happened to me, as clearly and straightforwardly as I could, but they didn't seem to want to believe me. They couldn't see what I could see. I don't think they wanted to see what I could see!*

*So they called for my parents and they asked them about me and about what had happened. My parents didn't have much to say. They were too scared. They didn't want to get in trouble with the leaders of the synagogue, so they left me to fend for myself ... like they always had. They were afraid, but I am not afraid. I can see now and I am not about to pretend that I can't see what I do see!*

*The Pharisees couldn't get past the fact that all this happened on a Sabbath. I'll tell you what I think about that: I think the Sabbath is a day for remembering God and for giving God thanks for all the good things God has done for us. And that's just what I do! Every Sabbath is an anniversary of the day God gave me sight!*

*The Pharisees didn't know what to make of Jesus. They called him a Sabbath-breaker and a sinner. They said they had no idea where he came from. But I have an idea! I know where he came from! Can't you see? Can't you see what he did for me? He cured me of my blindness. He made me well! He could not have done any of this unless he came from God!*

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(Read John 9:35-41)

*Surely you don't mean that we are blind, too?*

Surely he does! When you are blind, you are incapable of experiencing a thing -- or a person -- in all its dimensions. There was a man born blind who stood now seeing in the presence of the Pharisees, but they did see him.

To see a person is to see all the layers of thought and feeling, desire and longing, hopes and fears, courage and vulnerability, and to relate to him, to respect her, as a person with thoughts and feelings, desires and longings, hopes and fears, courage and vulnerability. Jesus saw him. And he saw Jesus.

Open our eyes, Lord! We want to see Jesus, to see him as he is -- not just the storybook character we heard about in Sunday School, not just the stern-faced and passive and untouchable face we see in paintings, not just the name we carry on our banners as we sally forth into the culture wars, not just the too-sweet and too-soft and too-indulgent guardian angel we call on to watch over our every step.

We want to see Jesus -- the One who reveals the blinding glory of God's goodness, the One who announces the impending approach of God's day of reckoning and justice, the One who offers the astonishing riches of God's grace to any man and to every woman, the One who restores our sight.

The One who opens our eyes ... to see each other. To see each other -- not just in two dimensions, as part of the scenery of our lives, props to pass by or push aside or climb over or simply ignore on our way to wherever it is we want to go, allies to recruit or threats to eliminate -- but to see each other, really see each other, as whole persons, as people with feelings and pain and desire and humanity, as children of God, too, endowed with all the beauty and all the unimpeachable value of the children of God -- these, the members of our own families, the members of our church family, our neighbors, our rivals, our enemies.

Open our eyes, Lord!