

The Sight Needed to Walk

Lent 4

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John 9:1-41

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is it to walk with the Lord? Or to walk before the Lord? Does it mean how you place one foot in front of the other as a means of getting from point A to point B, or something else?

In our Epistle text, we are called to “Walk as children of light.” So again, how do we do that? Or, better yet, what does that mean?

The term “walk”—as it is used in the Scriptures—is your way of life, your way of conducting yourself. It is not simply walking from one place to another, but it encompasses your entire life. So when we are commanded to “Walk as children of light” it is proper that Paul continues adding “(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and (in trying) to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”

As God’s Word tells us, though, of ourselves, we cannot do anything good or right or true. We are blind, dead, enemies of God. In continuing the metaphor of our lives as walks, then, what is needed to walk if not sight? Of ourselves, we are blind, so we need someone to open our eyes. Then we can see to walk. Where do we get such sight?

For a man born blind in our Gospel text, it came from Jesus. He received the spiritual sight necessary to walk with the Lord, in addition to his physical sight.

Verse 1

Our Gospel text begins with a question that we might even find ourselves asking from time to time: “‘who sinned, this man or his parents...?’” The question was asked about that man who had been born blind, but Jesus tells us that “‘It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.’” Then Jesus does the remarkable and cures the man’s blindness.

The interesting thing to note is that this man had been born blind in two ways, but that the disciples had focused on the man’s physical ability to see. They, like many today, were swayed by the idea of the theology of glory. One of the big concepts of this false theology is that one who is righteous would not suffer, and that, therefore, anyone who is suffering must have done something to deserve it.

Do you ever find yourself thinking like the disciples or the theologians of glory? Do you ever stop and wonder what sin your neighbor must have committed that he or she is suffering, whether by blindness, mental disability, or any other way?

Jesus teaches a better way: not to think of such people as having committed some sin which merited their disability. All of us are sinners by nature, and blind to the ways of God by nature. Don’t worry about whether your neighbor is blind, mentally handicapped, or anything else. Instead, worry that they hear God’s Word, that their blindness to God’s ways might be healed through the Gospel and that they may see God’s loving mercy.

Without that sight from God’s mercy found in our Lord Jesus Christ, none of us can walk with the Lord, we cannot bear the fruit of light or try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Verse 2

The next question is raised first by the man who was blind's neighbors, and then by the Pharisees: "how did he open your eyes?"

Here, instead of the theology of glory, it is the theology of the Pharisees which is a problem. They were more concerned with the fact that Jesus had made mud on the Sabbath day—against rabbinic law. The rabbinic laws listed thirty-nine forms of work which were forbidden on the Sabbath. Yet the point here is that while the man born blind had received his sight, his suffering had not ended. He went from being blind, to being healed, to being taken before the Pharisees, and ultimately kicked out of the synagogue.

Are there things which you do which you think others should do if they're quote-unquote "really Christians"? Do those things that you do come from the Scriptures and God's Law, or are they ones you found elsewhere that make you feel good, but are not really God's Law? More than that, are they ones which give you a false sense of security? God's Law in its fullest sense demonstrates how we are all sinners in need of repentance—not that we are capable of living it of ourselves.

Again, walking in the Lord means discerning what is pleasing to the Lord. It pleased the Lord to heal this man born blind on the Sabbath but not that these Pharisees would ignore their own sin as they accused Jesus of sinning on the Sabbath. But again, we don't want to miss what else was happening here: the man who had been born blind and was healed by Jesus hadn't been taken out of problems, and neither have we.

It's not that God is going to take us out of the world as soon as we come to faith, but that He teaches us how to live—how to walk—in this world, but not of it. He teaches us to see that He is still working through our suffering as well as when we are well. After all, Jesus did not abandon the man who had been born blind after healing him. Take another listen to the end of our text, where Jesus went to find the man after he had been cast out of the synagogue.

Verse 3

Jesus' final question is raised once He "heard that they had cast (the man born blind) out(.) (H)aving found him he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'" The man who had been born blind responds, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.' He said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshipped him."

The theology of the man born blind was brought to its conclusion with his belief and response. He had received his physical sight, heard the Pharisees quarrel over whether or not Jesus could have been from God since He had made mud on the Sabbath, and finally decided that He must have been from God to have healed his sight. But what is more, he sought to know the Son of Man, the Messiah to come.

The man who had been born blind had been led by the Spirit to see not only with his physical eyes, but also to see that Jesus was from God, and that He was the Son of Man with a capital "S" and a capital "M." He had not lost his faith as though he had committed some sin and not repented of it, but he had continued in his faith despite being cast out of the synagogue.

In his speaking to the Pharisees, the man had never claimed not to be a sinner; but they had acted as though they were able to keep from sinning. That is why Jesus said at the end of our text that "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains." It is the same as what we say at the beginning of service "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all

unrighteousness.” If you return to that line on p. 151, you’ll see that those words are from the Scriptures—from 1 John 1, verses 8 and 9.

The man who had been born blind had not denied his guilt as a sinful human being, and he had walked with Jesus. It was those Pharisees who claimed to “see”—to have no sin, who were deceiving themselves, and were not walking with God. You, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, are walking with God. You have been brought to the truth of your sinfulness by the Holy Spirit, brought to confession at the beginning of this service, and you have been brought to God’s forgiveness from the Son of Man, Jesus the Christ, who would go to the cross for your forgiveness, following this text.

In Jesus’ Name. Amen.