St. Matthew's Lutheran Church & School – Oconomowoc, WI
Fourth Sunday in Lent – Year A
John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39
March 15, 2026

Sermon: John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39
An Encounter with Jesus Never Leaves You the Same

Day hiking is an activity enjoyed by millions of people. There are some things you need to be aware of, but it is relatively safe. You get to enjoy God's creation and soak up the beautiful scenery and then load the car again at the end of the hike for the day and drive home. It's not like you are going deep into the wilderness and are off the grid for days on end. It's a one-day hike on a trail. That said, each year there are thousands of people that take a wrong turn or explore a little farther than they should be comfortable with and get lost while hiking. Of those, 99% either find their way back to the trail on their own or are found within the first few hours. Neal Peckens and Jason Hiser were part of the 1%. Neal and Jason were two friends that went for a hike in Glacier National Park in Montana. During the hike the weather turned and brought a beautiful light snow of an inch or two, just enough to cover the seldom used trail they were on. Suddenly they realized they were not on the trail and somewhere veered from it. Problem solved, just backtrack your footprints in the snow, except they were erased by the wind and continued snow fall. They consulted the map to figure out their location when a strong gust ripped it from their grip. As the map drifted down the valley so did their confidence in the situation. One day lost in the wilderness turned into six. On day six they heard the most beautiful sound in their lives, the distinctive thump of helicopter blades through the air. They were rescued. After their off-the-trail adventure Neal and Jason gave interviews and admitted they didn't think they were going to survive. They thought about their families. Jason and his wife were expecting their first child. Would he ever get to meet their baby? Would he be there for those first cries? Neal said that if he made it out of the situation that he would appreciate all the small things in life that you take for granted. He wouldn't get so upset about minor things and really appreciate life and the people in his life more than he had in the past.

It's interesting how spending six days lost in Glacier National Park can change your outlook on life. That close encounter with death never left them the same after that. It changed their perspective and what they thought was important and what was really important before and after that hike. They thought they saw things clearly in life, but it took a near death encounter of hiking in the wilderness blind without a trail and map for them to see things from a different perspective.

Let's think about this question for a moment: How do you see things in life? Maybe the answer your mind jumps to is, "Well, I haven't given it much thought, but I don't need glasses, so I think I see things well. I don't have 20/20 vison, but I think I can see things clearly." What if a speck of sawdust found its way into your eye? Each time you blink it imbedded farther into your eye. You can't blink because that brings pain and irritation and you can't not blink because that is the body's natural reaction to try to protect the eye. When that speck of sawdust is in our eye how quickly it changes our attitude. "What I would give just to be able to not have this pain and be able to see normally again." How quickly the physical can change our outlook on things.

That is where Jesus is going to go today. The events in our lesson are after Jesus "Light of the World" discourse in chapter 8. The Pharisees and crowd reject Jesus and appeal to their ancestry as children of Abraham. Jesus delivers his "I am God" statement to them with the subtly of an NFL lineman in a diving competition, *"Before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58)* and the crowd tried to stone him to death, but in another miracle that reveals their darkness he slips away from the crowd to another situation where he uses a physical reality to reveal their spiritual reality.

Jesus and his disciples see a man that was blind from birth. He never saw the beauty of a sunrise, the bright colors God arranged in his creation, never saw the faces of those that were speaking to him. He would have a different perspective on life, and the disciples also had a different perspective. *"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:1, 2).* The disciples vocalized a common Israelite cultural attitude of the day; this had to be the result of some sin. There was some reason for this to happen that God was punishing him in this way. We see that same attitude in the book of Job when everything is taken from Job and his friends come and give him the anti-comfort of, "What did you do Job? Admit it. You had to do something for all this to happen to you. Something you did brought all this suffering." The disciples repeat those sentiments with the man born blind. It's

an attitude we can fall into ourselves. Have you ever asked God this question, "What did I do to deserve this?" There must be something I've done that God is punishing me this way or to say that I don't deserve this from God and I deserve better because of who I am and what I've done. Jesus completely clears up those false thoughts for us today. Jesus' answer shocked the disciples and the Pharisees. He replies neither. It wasn't this man or his parents. In God's plan there are no coincidences. There is no luck. There's no karma. There isn't what goes around comes around. This man wasn't born blind because of any sin, and he didn't just happen to win the lottery of Jesus walking by him. Jesus tells us why, "*But this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:3-5).*

Jesus uses the man's physical blindness as an opportunity to give spiritual sight. Jesus makes a salve for the man's eyes with spit and mud, not exactly what the doctor would order. The prescription he gives the man is to wash in the Pool of Siloam. When the man went and washed the mud from his face, perhaps he saw his reflection in the water for the first time in his life. Word spread quickly about the man healed with mud, saliva, and washing. This alerted the Pharisees because the one they hated enough to try to put him death was at it again. They do some MSI, miracle scene investigation and they could not deny the fact the man born blind now sees, but they had to get to the bottom of what happened. They ask the man and his reply is simple and matter of fact, *"He put mud on my eyes…and I washed, and now I see" (John 9:15).* He couldn't explain how, but simply for the first time ever he can see. This left the Pharisees between a massive sized boulder and a hard place because they knew Jesus did the miracle, but how could he do that unless he is who he claims to be, the Son of God? Their spiritual blindness and unbelief means they cannot accept that answer.

This encounter with Jesus does not leave the blind man the same and it does not leave the Pharisees the same. Encountering Jesus never leaves you the same. After encountering Jesus, he is either the Savior of the world that gives sight and takes away my spiritual blindness or judgment against me is confirmed in my rejection of what he has done for me and I remain in spiritual blindness. There is no in between. There is no going halfsies with Jesus. Listen again to what Jesus says at the end of the lesson today, *"For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains" (John 9:39-41).* Immediately after the blind man confesses his faith and worships Jesus this is Jesus' response. Jesus is 20/20 vision clear in these verses. He says you either believe in him and through faith we have spiritual sight or we remain in spiritual blindness and darkness. We see both of those outcomes today in the lesson.

The temptation is to not get serious about Jesus. We try to be good. We try to be upright citizens. I want others to see me as a good person and hope they will say nice things about me when I'm gone. Let's not fool ourselves. When it came to putting on the "making-sure-everyone-can-see-how-good-of-a-person-I-am" show no one did it better than the Pharisees. They made sure people saw that they were trying their best to keep the Old Testament laws. What did Jesus tell them when they acted so shocked and asked if they were blind? Bingo! You nailed it. They were convicted of the spiritual blindness they denied because they rejected Jesus as the Savior. That's the reality Jesus forces us to see today. It makes it crystal clear the only way we have spiritual sight is through him.

The man that was born blind that encountered Jesus that day saw Jesus physically and saw Jesus spiritually as the Son of God. Physical blindness was easy for the disciples, Pharisees and us to recognize. Jesus uses the opportunity to teach about spiritual sight in him and spiritual blindness apart from him. It was because of our spiritual blindness that Jesus set his eyes on the cross. It was because of our spiritual blindness that he set his eyes to keeping the law perfectly in our place. He sees us. Each one of us. He sees us in our weakness, in our sin, in our rebellion, in our darkness. He loves us. He entered our world and took on our sin, rebellion, and darkness. He endured suffering to the point of the Fathers eyes turning away from Jesus on the cross so that he can see us for eternity, to give the spiritually blind sight. Our Savior had clear focus on why he came and who it was for. He came to focused on the cross. He came to do it for everyone, that includes you, that includes me. Now with spiritual sight we see the beauty of our guilt and sins taken from us. We see the punishment paid. We see our life not as one living for ourselves, but for the one who saved us. Now we see our life for eternity in heaven. Encountering Jesus never leaves us the same. It's a life changer for us. It's an eternity changer for us. Amen.