

Today's scripture relates a radical story of affirmation, empowerment and spiritual transformation. It might be more salient than ever for us, in our time populated with public talk around male privilege and racial tribalism.

who sinned: The worldview in ancient times was one of cause and effect between sin and suffering. They believed that everything happened for a reason, and that not one gets something for nothing. So if you were sick, it must be because you – or an ancestor – sinned. It's rooted in part in the ancient understanding of God's common pronouncements about sin, retribution, blessing and family, such as Exodus 20:5-6: "[And Yahweh said] ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments." The disciples seem to be looking for an explanation of where they can lay the blame for this man's blindness. Jesus however starts with what is (the blindness & suffering) and redirects it. The disciples want it to make sense, to be logical. She takes what is and looks for how God is calling us to be part of it.

he was born blind : This phrase is not in the original text, but added by translators to try to help explain the phrase. It implies that God made the man blind for a reason. But Jesus doesn't say that. Rather there is no explanation for it, and God takes what is – good and bad – to bring glory to his name.

GO TO SILOAM AND WASH: This was an ancient spot, thought to be one of miraculous works of God. So it's not bizarre that Jesus would send the blind man there to bathe.

sabbath day: On the sabbath (the 7th day: Friday sunset to Saturday sunset) one was not to work, but rather to spend the time in worship and service of God. The ancient Jewish leaders defined exactly what was considered work, and thus forbidden to do on the sabbath, and what wasn't. Much of this is recorded in writings called the Mishnah. There it's said that circumcision is permitted to do on the sabbath. So if doing that good is okay, then one would assume that doing good for the whole body of the blind man would be as well. The pharisees deem that Jesus as disobeyed the commandment. Jesus is a sinner for doing God's will.

mud: Ancient Church leaders saw in the use of mud a reference to the story of creation, of Adam and Eve being made from the earth "Adamah" (Biblical Hebrew : אָדָמָה)– or dirt, mud. Hence this man isn't merely healed, he's recreated by Jesus.

He is a prophet: This recognition of Jesus as from God is the same put on the lips of the Samaritan woman in John 4:19-25

¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, **I see that you are a prophet.** ...

SCRIPTURES FOR

SUNDAY 2.11.2018

John 9:1-41

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, *who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; **he was born blind** so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the *mud* on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made *mud*, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'GO TO SILOAM AND WASH.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a *sabbath day* when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "**He is a prophet.**"

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered,

²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

I came into this world for judgment: this phrase harkens back to John 3:16-21 which talks about the mission of Jesus to bring sight.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

³³ **If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.** : the formerly blind man reasons about Jesus much like Nicodemus did in John 3:2 “Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

“You were born entirely in sins: in other words he is not part of our community, our people – not a sheep of our fold or flock of Israel. Compare this to what Jesus says in John 10:24-14 “¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.”

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- **What shimmers for you in this story?**
- **With whom do you identify in the story? Why?**
- **Who is saved by Jesus? How? What does that mean?**
- **If Jesus did such miraculous signs of deliverance and recreation in his historic life, how does that intersect with our life today in 2018? Is this just a story, to teach a lesson, or is it more, a declaration of what God has done and what God will do in our lives and world? How do you sort that all out?**

“We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ **If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.**” ³⁴ They answered him, **“You were born entirely in sins,** and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, **“You have seen him,** and the one speaking with you is he.” ³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, **“I came into this world for judgment** so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.