

The Jesus I Want to Know:
The Gentle Healer
John 9:1-11

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The Gentle Healer came into our town today.
He touched blind eyes and the darkness left to stay.
More than the blindness, He took their sins away.
The Gentle Healer came into our town today.

The Gentle Healer of which Michael Card speaks is the Jesus I want to know. The 9th Chapter of John is a kind of showdown for Jesus. He heals a blind man and encounters the wrath of the powers that be. Come, let's listen in on this drama involving the disciples, an unnamed blind man, Jesus, the community, the parents, and the religious authorities of the day.

A BLIND MAN SEES. One who has never seen the light of day, the colors of trees, the face of a friend, is treated by Jesus with mud pies which when washed off in the pool of Siloam empowers eyesight he never dreamed possible. Even a casual read of this story leaves one asking "What's happening here?" Our inquiring minds want to know.

I read it now with different eyes than I have read it before and I would like to share with you what is kind of new in this story for me. When you are ill, you use what you've got. The pool of Siloam was an open air basin twenty by thirty feet fed by a conduit into the city leading to a spring in the Kidron Valley. It was built not for healing purposes, but for defense purposes. To think that a combination of dirt and saliva could set in motion a healing process that culminated with a baptismal bath in the pool of Siloam is strange to us.

Even knowing that other people, including Africans and Egyptians, considered saliva to have a therapeutic effect does little to explain the healing methods of Jesus in this story. There is a deeper truth that hits home. We beggars can't be choosers. You have to use what you've got all the time in trying to find health. After having a negative reaction to several kinds of chemotherapy, I said to my oncologist, "You know people fifty years from now are going to look back on the present day treatments for cancer and consider them barbaric." With a smile on his face he said, "I know, but it's the best we've got at the present." When you are ill you use what you've got; that is what is happening in this story. Jesus uses the resources that he has in his day to try to make a blind man well.

So I understand why people travel to Lourdes to drink the spring water hoping to be healed, or attend a Benny Hinn Crusade seeking a special touch, or take alternative medicines praying that vitamins might be the answer. Beggars can't be choosers. You use what you've got. When you are ill, you take what you can

get. Jesus touched him. That divine touch proved to be enough.

There are all kinds of movements in our day, many of them sponsored by New Age adherents promoting the power of touch. One group encouraging parents to touch their children says touch is the most important of all the senses. It stimulates all the other senses. It stimulates language and communication. It promotes bonding and attachment. Hugged children are happy children and for a price, they will come and teach you how to hug your children.

Another promotional item says, "Touch unlocks compassion and heartfelt care between the provider and the client which makes them equal partners in facilitating health and healing." As I read a dozen or so websites all talking about the power of touch, almost all of them from a new age perspective, I walked away with a question on my mind. Has fear and abuse caused the Church to abandon one of its most effective tools of healing? Can we create a community where children can be hugged without being hurt, youth and adults touched without being hit on and the elderly once more feel the comfort of human hands without embarrassment?

When you are ill, you go with what you can get and sometimes a hug or a pat on the shoulder is just the healing touch that we need. While authorities are trying to pick this miracle apart, the blind man who now sees sticks to one single statement, "I once was blind but now I see." Nothing else really matters. He knew he had been helped and that made all the difference. It didn't matter to him whether the treatment had been approved by the FDA or not. It didn't matter to him that it had been done on a Sabbath day and he broke a law. He just knew one thing, "I was blind, but now I see."

Bob Allred tells the story about a country preacher who was listening to a seminary professor cast doubt on the core issues of the faith. When the professor finished his lecture, the elderly pastor got up, took an apple from his lunch bag and started eating it as he said, "Mr. Professor, I haven't read many of them books you quoted." Then he took another bite of the apple. "Mr. Professor, I don't know much about the great thinkers you mentioned," as he took still another bite of his apple. "Mr. Professor, I admit I haven't studied the Bible like you have," as he finished his apple and dropped it back in the bag. "I was just wondering, this apple that I just ate, was it sour or sweet? The Professor responded, "How could I know? I haven't tasted your apple." To which the old preacher replied, "With all due respect, sir, I was just wondering if you had ever had a taste of my Jesus?" The blind man says "Whether or not the cure was approved by the FDA, I once was blind, but now I see." You all argue and explain all you want, but that's enough for me.

THERE ARE NONE SO BLIND AS THOSE WHO WILL NOT SEE. There is physical blindness and there is spiritual blindness. Helen Keller, who was blind since the age of nineteen months once said, "The worst thing that can befall a person is not to lose your sight, but to lose your vision."

Backgrounds can blind us. The disciples, along with all people of their day, had been taught that sin and sickness go together like love and marriage or a horse and carriage. The disciples are the ones who first saw him sitting by the side of the road begging. It was a common sight. Why they picked him out I have no idea. There were multitudes of others sitting around him, but they picked him out and posed the question to Jesus. Did you get it? It is in the second verse you heard read this morning, *“Who sinned, this man or his parents?”* They also tell us that he has been blind since birth, so I don’t know when he got a chance to sin in his life. In Exodus 20:5, right in the middle of the Ten Commandments, it says, *“I, the Lord your God, punish the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”* Some people believe that. Jesus had a different idea. It rains on the just and the unjust. Good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people.

Psychiatrist Scott Peck said that we inherently resist change in ourselves and others. “Patients come to me all the time asking for change. But from the moment the therapy begins they start fighting change tooth and nail.” The truth may set you free, but first it will make you mad.

Fear can blind us. These parents who had suffered all their lives are now confronted with the possibility of being excommunicated from the synagogue. So instead of defending him, they say to authorities, *“Ask him, he is of age. Let him speak for himself”* (Verse 21). Few denominations excommunicate people any more. But people in all denominations are constantly threatening to excommunicate themselves if things don’t go their way in a particular place. Such power plays blind us to the healing power of God.

Judgementalism can blind us. The Church is not a place to dissect miracles, turn the blessed into the accused, or question the grace of God in people’s lives. But that is exactly what the Pharisees are doing here; they have a problem with this healing. Never mind that somebody could see, that’s not the issue. Somebody else by the name of Jesus broke the law of the Sabbath. They cannot rejoice with those who rejoice and they are not willing to weep with those who weep. They have an opinion about everything under the sun; they insist that everything must fit. Jesus doesn’t fit because he heals a man on the Sabbath. All they can see is the violation of the Sabbath.

Some call the Pharisees nit-pickers. You know the source of that word? As school teachers here know, head lice take up residence next to your scalp. Each nit, or tiny egg, must be meticulously combed, picked, or pulled from a single strand of hair. Some folk become obsessed with nit-picking. With meticulous care they find something wrong with everything. The pick at life’s joys, tarnish life’s triumphs, and make critical comments about every victory. That’s what the Pharisees were doing. They couldn’t rejoice with this man. They were too busy nit-picking the fact that Jesus had broken a law. You know what it is like.

- Wasn't that a beautiful wedding? Yes, but it's a shame the bride didn't lose a few pounds.
- Congratulations on your new promotion. I hope you get along with your new boss better than I did.
- Have you seen Jane's new baby? Too bad the little thing looks just like her father.
- Isn't this sanctuary beautiful? It's a shame we don't have a preacher who can fill it up.

It is a wonderful thing that a blind man got healed, but it is awful that Jesus did it on the Sabbath. You know what I am talking about. And so it kills the joy of a great happening in a man's life.

Albert Einstein said, "We cannot solve the problems we have created with the same thinking that created them. We must not close our minds; we must let our hearts be free."

The Gentle Healer is here at church today.

He is the truth, the life, the way.

He wants to touch you at your point of need.

Will you trust Him with your hurts and your pains and your problems and your spiritual emptiness as you come to receive this holy sacrament today?

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Amen.

