

March 15, 2026

St. John's Tappahannock

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John 9:1-41

Good morning! Today is the 4th Sunday in Lent, and there are only two more weeks until Palm Sunday! Please take a look at all the opportunities to reflect on our spiritual journeys this time of year that are listed in the bulletin insert, after the service.

Every week our Episcopal calendars provide the color for each Sunday of the church year, for the vestments and paraments that beautify the altar. This Sunday we see the color rose, instead of the normal purple. It is considered a sign of hope in this period of introspection. This is also called *Lautare* Sunday, which means rejoice. So just like last Monday and Tuesday when we had a chance to enjoy spring weather, before the official day of Spring's return on March 21st, we can rejoice that the winter is almost over! Thank you to Sherry Lewis, our head sacristan and vestry liaison for worship who researched this for us. Thank you also to our altar flower minister Susan Motley for adding the floral accents of tiny roses in the greens.

So we have had several stories from the gospel of John during Lent, and you may be wondering, why during Liturgical Cycle of Year A, when we study Matthew, are we reading so many stories from John? The answer is, during each of the three ABC years we study Matthew, Mark and Luke respectively, because they are closely related by their common source material. John which was written 3-4 decades later than the other three gospels has its own unique source material and perspective given the progress of the growing church. So instead of having a fourth really different cyclical year D, stories from the gospel of John are sprinkled through each year. In fact, the stories we have read in the last four weeks, Nicodemus, the Samaritan Woman at the Well, today's

gospel and next week's raising of Lazarus are unique to the gospel of John. We will get back to Matthew on Palm Sunday.

In the gospel of John we find the famous I am statements, two of which we find subtly referenced today's scripture readings: [I am, ("Most assuredly, before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58)]; **I am the Good Shepherd**; I am the Bread of Life, **I am the Light of the world**, I am the Door, I am the Resurrection and the Life, and I am the True Vine.)

An interesting thing too about the gospel of John versus the three synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, is that in the synoptics, Jesus teaches his disciples throughout the Galilean ministry, in brief parables and sayings, but in John, Jesus does not teach his disciples until the last evening before the crucifixion at the Last Supper. He compresses all Jesus instruction into one long farewell address. So John narrates two and a half years in the first 12 chapters, then takes 5 chapters for the last evening of Jesus life. There is no last week in John, only a last night. One third of the gospel is devoted to the last twenty-four hours of Jesus earthly life.

I would like to share some insights from An Introduction to The New Testament, History, Literature and Theology, by Eugene Boring. **1** This was the required text for our New Testament course at Church Divinity School of the Pacific, in Berkeley CA, where I received my Anglican Studies Certificate in 2015. **In the chapters on John 9:1-41, the author shows us that the three Christological themes introduced in the prologue of the gospel of John are also present in the man born blind gospel story which we read today. Christology can be defined as the branch of Christian theology relating to the person, nature and work of Jesus, especially as it relates to his human and divine nature.**

So let's start by taking a look at these key verses from John 1.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1)...and the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of

grace and truth. (John 1:14)...No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, who has made him known.” (John 1:18)

The three key concepts found here are that of **Logos, Wisdom, and the Absolute God.**

We cannot read: “In the Beginning”, without thinking of the first words of the Bible in which the whole creation came into being by the Words of God, starting with “Let there be light...”. The term **Logos**, Greek for “word”, encompasses the idea that Jesus, the Word, was with God at the beginning.

So too, was **Wisdom** present in the beginning. While the whole Wisdom picture is not found in any specific text, Wisdom’s story can be constructed from the numerous references in the Old Testament and Jewish Wisdom literature including Proverbs, Psalms, Sirach, and in the Apocrypha, and in the books Enoch and Wisdom of Solomon. Here is one familiar example about Wisdom’s part in Creation, from Proverbs 8:

²² **The LORD created me at the beginning^[b] of his work,^[c]
the first of his acts of long ago.**

²³ **Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.**

²⁴ **When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.**

²⁵ **Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—**

²⁶ **when he had not yet made earth and fields,^[d]
or the world’s first bits of soil.**

²⁷ **When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,**

²⁸ when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
³⁰ **then I was beside him, like a master worker;^[e]**
and I was daily his^[f] delight,
rejoicing before him always,
³¹ **rejoicing in his inhabited world**
and delighting in the human race.

Perhaps more familiar are these verses from Proverbs 3:13-20.

¹³ Happy are those who find wisdom,
and those who get understanding,
¹⁴ for her gain is better than silver,
and her revenue better than gold.
¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.
¹⁶ Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honour.
¹⁷ Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.
¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;
those who hold her fast are called happy.
¹⁹ The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens;
²⁰ by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.

This is a very familiar scripture:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,

and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. (Proverbs 9:10)

So we see that Wisdom is present with God in creation, and in Christ in whom are found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (see Colossians 2:3)

John is clear that the Christian faith deals with the Absolute, the one and only God (17:3) represented by the universal Logos through whom all things and all people were created (1:1-14) This transcendent Logos is the source of all light and life; wherever it may be found, not only in the history of Israel and the life of Jesus Christ (1:9-10) whatever truth exists in the world, recognized or not, belongs to this one universal light that shines in human darkness. All truth is one, all light comes from the one God, Creator of all. John does not compromise the absoluteness of God. This is the affirmation of the first stanza of the prologue. The Absolute God, the Logos, has become flesh, in Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, who will act with the insights of Wisdom.

So John knew that the world is relative, not absolute, in terms of religious belief, yet understood that the Judeo Christian God works in and through everything, even diverse peoples, beyond our understanding of it. And within even John's community, there was debate and misunderstanding. In other words, John believed that the power of the resurrection is woven through in all things.

So how are these Christological themes present in the man born blind?

The man born blind represents Jesus power to heal, but also an invitation to relationship with the Christ, and fullness in this life in Him now and into eternal life. The blind man was not someone who had sight, and lost it. Human beings in John do not lose their sight and have it restored by the Christ who came into the world. They have never seen, but can gain (not re-gain) authentic sight (9:39). Jesus' concluding comment, (*I came into this world for judgement so that*

those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’, shows that this sign, like all his signs, is not merely a literal miracle for an individual, but the symbolic representation of the Christ who will come again.

In addition, the blind man is anointed, washed, and is given his sight. These are all symbolic actions for the conversion to the following of Jesus, as well. (Siloam, the name of the pool where the blind man was directed to go, is Hebrew for “sent”). So both the blind man was *sent* as a test of obedience and to be healed, just as the One who was Sent, Jesus, was led into the wilderness to be tested before he started his ministry. Jesus was washed and anointed in baptism, and Jesus was filled with insight and Wisdom for his ministry and purpose. (John 9:7, 39-41, 13:1-11, 1 John 2:20, 27). **So what Jesus does for the blind man in the story is what God does for the world in sending his Son into the world.**

Also in this story, John emphasized that those who receive the gift of faith God must take a stand; it is not enough to believe in Jesus who is manifested in the healing of the blind man as the Light of life, and keep a low profile, as though the transaction were only between God and the individual. John also portrays the hesitancy of the parents to acknowledge what had happened when challenged by the Jewish authorities, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; (9:18-23), just as he condemns those who believe but will not publicly confess their faith and identify with the persecuted community.

In contrast, the healed blind man is a model of progressive deepening of faith, insight and courage. He is the first one in the gospel to confess Jesus in a hostile situation. His understanding of Jesus does not come all at once. Under examination he moves from identifying Jesus as a man, (9:17) to a prophet (9:17) that he is from God (9:33) to the full confession of Jesus as the Son of Man, that is, the Messiah (9:35-38).

So what is our takeaway today? Certainly the point can be made about how Jesus alleviating concerns about healing on the sabbath, and one's blindness (or some other illness) being the result of someone's sin.

My favorite line is this (v.25): *All I know is, 'I was blind and now I can see'; ... 'So, in you, Lord I believe'*. (v.38) In other words, another person, like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, become followers because of their encounter with Jesus.

At a time like this when there is much to despair, might we make sure we are not blind to hope. Hope has nothing to do with wishful thinking; hope is the good news, which constantly reminds us to say with the blind man, with confidence, 'In you Lord, I believe.'

Kristy Tippet, in a 2024 issue of Orion Magazine, suggests that "Hope is a muscle, a practice, a choice: to live open-eyed and wholehearted in the world as it is and not as we wish it to be. We are strange creatures. We mask fear with rage, and despair with violence. Growth is messy, never linear. We have so far to go to live into our name *homo-sapiens*, the creatures who are wise. And we may not get there. Yet I know in life and in society, wisdom emerges precisely at those moments when we have to hold seemingly opposing realities in a creative tension and interplay: power and frailty, birth and death, pain and hope, beauty and brokenness, mystery and conviction, calm and fierceness, mine and yours."

"May we be healed of our blindness to hope, the kind of hope that keeps us amazed at the larger narrative of our century, of the learning and wisdom unfolding right along-side our better publicized dysfunction and decay."

"May we allow ourselves to pause, every once in a while, and draw a long collective astonished breath. May the care with which we are forced to attend to each other now during these many crises, become a

natural habit when we return to certain norms, and keep alive our concern for the well-being of everything from the environment, to those who are at socio-economic risk, to every form of inequality, and not be blind to the ways we can make a difference.”

“For hope reminds us that we are strange creatures: again and again we are made by what would break us.” **2**

Amen.

Resources

- 1.** Boring, M. Eugene; An Introduction to The New Testament, History, Literature and Theology; Westminster John Know Press; Louisville Kentucky;2012; p. 680-692
- 2.** *Recentering hope in a world which aims to divide*; by Krista Tippett; Orion Magazine Spring 2020; How Earth Endures; March 2, 2020.

