

15 March 2026
Lent 4

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“More Than Meets the Eye”

Text: John 9:1-41; Ephesians 5:8-14; Isaiah 42:14-21

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

The readings that we heard today are all about *seeing*. So I would like to consider that a bit today. How we see. How we look at things.

First, as an adult, I can look at something and see a piece of junk. However, a child may look at the very same thing and see a treasure. And in the same way, there may be something that I, as an adult, see as a treasure, which a child looks at and sees a piece of junk. *What's the difference?* Not the thing, but our worldview. Learning and growing up means seeing things from a different perspective.

Another thing about seeing: sometimes it's easy and sometimes it's hard. At night, for example, seeing is hard, and though *you think* you see something, when the light goes on, you realize it wasn't what you thought at all.

Or think of microscopes and telescopes. Perhaps you look at something and think you can see it and judge it pretty well and have a good idea of what it is, but then when you look at that same thing through a microscope or a telescope, you see something *completely different!* And you realize it wasn't what you thought at all.

I guess you could say there is more to seeing than meets the eye. A lot more.

So it was in the Holy Gospel we heard today. There was a lot of *seeing* going on, but not a few different perspectives.

First there was the man who had been born blind. You could say he saw nothing. But that would be only physically. He *did* see, in a sense. For as seeing is more than meets the eye, he saw the world as a judging and condemning place. A place that thought that either he or his parents had so grievously sinned that his blindness was the punishment of God upon him. And so he was seen by the world as someone who was of little worth and under a curse. Even after he was given his sight by Jesus, he couldn't do anything right, he couldn't say anything right. He was a misfit and an outcast. Much like the Samaritan woman we heard about last week.

There are people seen that way today as well. People who are handicapped, or elderly, are often seen as of little worth. Babies are sometimes seen as treasures, and sometimes seen as junk to be gotten rid of. How often do we see other people as nuisances, rather than gifts from God? Some things never change . . .

Then there was Jesus - how was He seen? His disciples called Him Rabbi and confessed Him as the Christ, but they really didn't know what that meant yet. The Pharisees saw Jesus as a rule breaker and a sinner, someone who did not fit their conception of God and the way someone of God should be. They saw Jesus as a threat. Then there was the blind man, who was just *learning* how to see, in *every* sense of the word! He was physically learning how to see in the world, and he was spiritually learning how to see Jesus.

He reminds me of a baby on his first day of life, being held by his father or mother in the hospital and just staring, seeing for the first time; learning how to see . . .

So, how do people see Jesus today? Well, much the same now as then. Some see Him as an example, some as a prophet or great teacher, some confess Him as Christ and yet don't really know what that means. Some see Him as a threat to how they want to live their lives, and some are like the Pharisees - *who saw so much they became blind*. They weren't bad guys, the Pharisees. They were good people who knew their Bibles inside and out. But they so much saw the sin in others that they became blind to the sin in themselves. They stared so long and hard at their own piety that they became blind to the good in others. They knew the words of their Bibles so much that they forgot what those words meant! They had become so blind, in fact, that they couldn't see the fulfillment of all the Scriptures standing right before their faces! *They are a caution to folks like you and me today.*

But the most important eyes in the story today are the eyes of Jesus. How did He see others? A bit differently than all that! For He saw not with merely human eyes, but with the eyes of compassion and mercy, ***to do the works of God***. *He sees* His perfect creation marred and disfigured and in need of restoration. *He sees* darkened minds which need the light of His truth. *He sees* outcasts in need of welcome, and the frightened in need of comfort. *He sees* those who claim to be holy but aren't, but who are in need of repentance. *He sees* sinners in need of forgiveness. *And He sees rightly*. His seeing - in all the ways one sees - is perfect. And to provide what is needed is the work of God He has come to do.

And that is how Jesus sees you - in all of the above ways. For He doesn't see the *you* you *want* others to see - He sees through that, and sees rightly. So its not the successful you, the strong you, the brave you, the "It's all good" you - how you act for

everyone else. He sees rightly and clearly the frightened you, the weak you, the “I don’t know how I’m going to get through this” you, the ashamed you, the sinful you. The you who is just like that man born blind, who everyone else is talking about and judging. The you who others - and maybe even you yourself! - look at and see junk, but whom Jesus looks at *and sees a treasure*.

Like the blind man. Nobody else cared about him, except as an object of conversation. But Jesus did. And notice - the man didn’t even ask for healing! He was beyond hope. As he told the Pharisees: ***Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.*** You know, I wonder if he even knew what was going on. At first, at least. The day had started like every other day. He was begging by the side of the road. Then this man, who he knew only as ***“the man called Jesus”*** rubs mud on his eyes and tell him to go wash it off. And he is given sight. Physical sight, and then also spiritual sight. By water and the Word of this One who has come to do the works of God.

And again, I am reminded of babies - the babies we bring here to baptism. They start the day like every other day of their young lives. They don’t ask Jesus for anything. They don’t even know what’s going on when the Word of God hits their ears and that cold water descends upon their head! But by water and the Word of God, the work of God is done. They receive the eyes of faith and the forgiveness of all their sins, and though their mouths cannot yet form the words, their hearts cry out with us: ***“Lord, I believe.”*** For surely a man who can open the eyes of a man born blind can do this as well.

And He does. He has. For that’s exactly what Jesus has *for you*. For you, too, were born blind - no, even worse! - dead in your trespasses and sins, the Bible tells us (Ephesians 2). But the work of God was done in you, too, through water and the Word, to raise you from the death of sin and give you faith and forgiveness, that you may be children of light. Walking by faith. *Fixing your eyes on Jesus* (Gradual).

And now seeing Jesus *rightly*. As Saviour. As Giver. As the One who has ***come to do the works of God*** for you, in you, and through you. And still is.

And again, like the man once blind, though we can see, yet still we are learning to see. To see more and more. Staring with eyes of faith at the amazing things of God and learning of Him. Staring at the manger, at our God born so little for us. Staring at the cross, at our God who laid down His life for us to atone for our sins. Staring at the empty tomb, at our God who rose for us, breaking the bonds of death and the grave to give us life. Staring at these amazing things with our eyes of faith, and drinking them in. Believing, yet always learning, too, what these things mean for us; of the great love of God for us.

And seeing Jesus rightly, then learning to see others differently, too. As our heavenly Father sees them. As our heavenly Father sees you. Not as junk, but as treasures. As worth our time. As worth our lives. As worth our love.

And so does your heavenly Father love you. Maybe the baby analogy can help us here again . . . for while a newborn is staring up at her father and mother, father and mother are not only staring back, but *speaking*. Comforting, already teaching, so their child will know their voice.

And that's what our heavenly Father does. For the voice of God, the Word of God, is none other than Jesus Himself, who comforts and teaches us. So that we know Him; that we know His voice and fear not. So He speaks. *By His Word* He teaches us about what we are seeing of Him, His great love and all that He has done for us. *By His Word* He teaches us about ourselves and our sin and to repent. *By His Word* He speaks His absolution, comforting us with the forgiveness of our sins. And *by His Word* He feeds us - first with the pure spiritual milk of His Word, and then also with the meat of His Body and Blood. That the life He has given be well nourished and grow, healthy and strong in His forgiveness. That the life He has given live forever.

That day in Jerusalem, that work of God was done in that blind man's life. In not too many days from then, that work of God was done *for the world*, as Jesus ascended the cross to give His life as the Lamb of God, a ransom for the sin of the world. And this morning, that work of God is done here, through water and word and bread and wine. And yet, in Jerusalem, Calvary, and here, these are not all different works of God, but one and the same work of God, accomplished by the same God made flesh for us. That we who were blind may see Jesus, and learn to see Him rightly: as your giving God; your Saviour. So come, O children of God. Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.