**John 9:1-41 (ESV)**

“Suffering To See The Savior”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. To say that we live in an image driven society is an understatement. Those old family photos of great grandma and grandpa are hard to find, happen to be in shades of black and white, and have a character different from today’s photos on the family Christmas card. Matter a fact, as much as we love the saying, “You cannot judge a book by its cover.” Not many ever really end up reading any books these days. The picture world has expanded beyond a piece of paper to moving images on television and now to personal interaction on computers. The standard view echoing throughout the business world today has no shame to state in our society that, “Image IS everything.”

 I suppose overemphasis on image is what also makes people shutter over losing their vision. We certainly know it happens with age, but never being able to see is a kind of death sentence in our gleaming society of lights, camera, and action. St. John the apostle invites us into this isolated world today that roughly 1.3 million people[[1]](#footnote-1) currently experience in America. However, it is more than compassion for the blind and praying for miraculous acts from the medical field. The Concordia Study Bible notes,

“…it is too simple to say that God wants His people to enjoy perfect health. We should not expect miracles on our terms. All these things are subject to God’s greater purposes. He allows suffering and brings healing where and when He wills” (1800).

The greatest gift far beyond physical sight is for sinners to stand in the good news given by the Savior Jesus Christ.

Before His encounter with a blind man, Jesus had just stepped away from a dangerous situation with the Pharisees. The last verse of chapter 8 before today’s reading of chapter 9 concludes, “So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.” (John 8:59). As God’s Son dismissed Himself from those who did not want Him in their presence. He came upon another person whose dismal situation would not deny the saving Word sent from the Father. The disciples misjudged the blind man’s suffering as some sinful judgment by God. Jesus quickly corrected such false deception caused by the Devil. He said, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” This display would start with a physical manifestation of giving sight to a blind man. However, the greater miracle for him later was the spiritual sight of faith in Jesus as God’s Son.

Everything in Christianity comes first to the ear then to the eye. It is Word based rather than worshiping the wonders we see. God made creation by His Word and the same Word now speaks to save sinners. The blind man never saw any wonders of this world, but unlike others, he could especially hear well. Jesus using salvia-drenched mud to put on His eyes did not distract the man a bit. What was promising to him was simply to hear “go and wash” only to return seeing. The reason to welcome babies to baptism is just as simple. They need to hear the Gospel. No child can use their eyes right after birth. All of us were like the blind man, helpless and disorientated in a sinful world. Yet, we know the ears of a child are already listening in the womb. Christ preaches good news to the weakest be they blind or a baby. Before we ever see, God wants to speak first to our ears so our eyes view the world with Him as the Savior. Thank God if you were baptized as an infant, because you never had to gaze upon this sinful creation without Jesus.

 Amazing as it must have been to look upon the wonders of creation and to see the faces of his family and friends. Those eyes could not ignore what also stood against the gift given by Jesus. The blind man that now could see disrupted the community. As a result, they lead the man to the temple for the Pharisees to judge. Strangely enough, his answer did not change because of the situation saying, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." After suffering bombardment of question after question, he had to watch his own parents bow out to save face. The man finally pushed it to the breaking point out, “Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ They answered him, ‘You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?’ And they cast him out.” For all the wonders with sight, this man saw himself just as secluded from the picture simply because He stood on Jesus’ Word.

 The baptized into Christ have a different worldview because of what God has done. Remember, it was the eye that made Eve judge the fruit of the tree “to be pleasing” to her sight. This is the focus of our image driven society indulging over whatever entertains the eye. It is all about style with no savior as the substance to speak forgiveness to sinners. No matter how pretty the picture, family life still suffers from much pain. No matter how faithful the spouse or sexual pure life, the eye wanders much in our society. No matter concerns with how the body looks, it does not bring comfort to the soul facing sin and death. No matter how full a church appear, only Christ saves a single person by faith in His true Word and Sacrament. St. Paul told the Christians at Ephesus,

“Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

Whatever the place or status of people the baptized stand on Jesus’ Word witnessing to what God has done. This truth turns everything in a sinful world right side up to reveal to sinners the Father’s love by His Son. It disrupts man-centered community, can cause conflict and questions, and maybe even brings exclusion. Christ sees everything and promises to come with compassion to the brokenhearted.

 As much as the man born blind could see, his eyes could not explain or justify his suffering. How quickly did Jesus the Savior come for this man so sight would not drag him away into despair. Upon His arrival Jesus said,

"Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.’ He said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him.”

Christ’s presence is peace to those bearing crosses in this world of sin and death. He comes today to His baptized people holding out His presence by the Sacrament. It strengthens and speaks faith in Him as the Savior turning our world right side up. Nothing will separate us from the love that God has shined upon our lives.

Christ has fulfilled all that we see in sinful failures that have fallen upon our lives. Christ faces our image driven society with His perfect crucified body on the cross. Christ destroys doubts over suffering for the sake of the Gospel by declaring His death and resurrection as the victory for His saints. Jesus firmly places Himself before our eyes by bread and wine having no limits with His Word saying, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” We need not despair over a fallen creation or disregard the promises made by the Gospel. Instead, the miracle Jesus displays in the blind man goes beyond physical sight to the spiritual blessing of a repentant faith in Him. This good news exceeds any worldview that denies worship and praise to God’s Son, our Savior. It is to the ears, where Jesus opens th eyes to see. He says, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.

1. http://www.nfb.org/nfb/blindness\_statistics.asp [↑](#footnote-ref-1)