

He's another one of those nobodies, like the Samaritan woman at the well, way, way down on the ladder of social status – notice, all through this long, long story, he never gets a name, just a bunch of labels-“the man born blind”, the one “born in sin”.

Oddly, all the while he's blind, he's also invisible! Folks don't see him - day after day he sits in that same place, and folks scurry by, tripping over him, ignoring him, cursing or helping him, but never really seeing him. Not ever Jesus.

Till one day, the disciples see, well, not HIM, but a theological problem, an object of debate. “Rabbi, who sinned?”

Then Jesus sees him, and, according to John, starts with the preaching that I still say would have been so unlike him at a time like this. What IS like him is what comes next.

He squats down, gathers up some dust, spits into it a few times, forms a muddy paste (a “work”, by the way, that was forbidden because it's a Sabbath!) and tenderly molds it over those empty, useless eyes.

Go and wash, says Jesus, so he does, and heads back into town. Now, imagine all that he sees on that journey, all the beauty, but all the squalor, too. All the wonder, but all the terror, as well.

Suddenly, now, everyone sees him – he's stirred up quite a fuss –and there ensues this argument that's really, really funny on the one hand, and just sad, stupid, and vicious, on the other!

Some of the religious leaders are astute enough to recognize something has happened that changes everything forever, but they're too frightened, and threatened, and petty, to know what to do with it all!

It's not the same guy!” they say.

Okay, then he wasn't really blind!

And Jesus healed him on a Sabbath, so he's a sinner!

And a sinner couldn't have healed him!

(And who are you to tell us anything, you “born in sin” guy? Notice the obsession with sin, here, in which Jesus has very little interest!)

Round and round they go, arguing over and around the Once Blind Guy, who starts with very few words, as frightened, perhaps, at first, as they

...yeah, it's me. That guy Jesus did it. He's a prophet...

but ends with that little speech of clarity, brilliance, courage and conviction that is the last straw for the leaders, and gets him thrown out of the synagogue, where, I'm betting, he never really had a place to sit, and wasn't much wanted anyway.

Jesus comes looking for him, which he'll always do, when we're tossed aside, aching and alone and wondering, "What now?"

Do you believe, asks Jesus.

What should I believe, says the man.

Believe what you see.

Me, right here before you, with love in my eyes,
and healing in my hands,
and a place for you at my side.

Then, yes, Lord, I believe.

Now he really sees. Not with his eyes, but with the faith of his heart.

He's utterly changed, from the inside out, and his new sight is only just the smallest part of it all. He's grown from a helpless, blind, shunned, invisible nobody, to a beloved and honored disciple with a story to tell.

That's what God's love will do for you.

Stand you up on your feet, and then fill your heart with courage, your mouth with good news, and your eyes with Jesus.

Because seeing life through him and his love is the only real seeing there is.

Seeing yourself as he sees you, a gifted and trusted disciple with a story to tell and a work of love to do.

Seeing absolutely every other person - no exceptions - as a beloved child of God bound for heaven.

Seeing this world as the place where God is at work.

Seeing heartache as the beginning of greater courage and love.

Seeing tragedy and loss as the place of grace.

Seeing a God whose light drives back every darkness,

And whose love is stronger than death, breaking its hold on us and this world in every corner, in every moment forever.