a newborn baby just to create a teaching aid. More likely, Jesus is saying: “Don’t even ask that question: just wait and see what happens next.”

What happens next is both miraculous and disgusting! Jesus spits on the ground and makes a muddy poultice, which he spreads on the blind man’s eyes. Throughout the gospels, Jesus uses a variety of methods to heal people. Sometimes it is with a touch. Other times it is simply a word spoken. In Mark 10, Jesus heals a blind man named Bartimaeus simply by saying, “Your faith has made you well.” Here, Jesus chooses spit and mud. Gross, but effective.

Why Jesus chooses this primitive medical treatment may have something to do with the disciples’ question. They are voicing the prevailing wisdom of their age, but they are also incredibly insensitive to the feelings of the man before them. There he is in the all-encompassing darkness that is his life. He knows nothing different. He is acutely aware of the footfalls of everyone coming up to him. The voices he hears may be kind or they may be mocking. It is not unusual for passersby to spit on him, cursed by God as he surely is, on account of his disability.

So, when he hears Jesus drawing up a great wad of spittle, the blind man expects the worst. Maybe he cringes, waiting for the insult to come. But this teacher does something different. Something unexpected. Jesus uses the spittle to make mud and gently spreads it over the man’s blind eyes. Then he tells him to go wash it off, in the Pool of Siloam. John tells us the man does as Jesus instructs, washing his face in the Pool of Siloam. Once he is done, it is as though he has new eyes. For the first time in his life, he can see!

You might expect this miraculous news to set off great rejoicing in the land! Not so. Quite the opposite happens. There is a well-established pecking order in the community. Anchoring the bottom of that pecking order, for his whole life, is the man blind from birth. If you wanted someone to spit on, he was your man! But suddenly, Jesus’ miracle changed all that; and those at the top of the religious pecking order — the Pharisees — are not too happy about it. Jesus just turned the social order on its head.

When the Pharisees hear about this, they are alarmed. They are suspicious of Jesus’ religious reform movement, which is growing bigger by the day. So, they haul the formerly blind man before them for a courtroom-style cross-examination. The Pharisees heard that Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath. All they need now is a little evidence to prove it.

Now, if Jesus had simply said to the man, “Your faith has made you well,” there be no problem. But because Jesus made a concoction of spit and mud, he is working. On the Sabbath. Gotcha, Jesus! At least that is what some of the Pharisees think. How could a man who worked on the Sabbath be God’s instrument? But other Pharisees looked at what he’d just done for the blind man and asked themselves, “How could he *not* be God’s instrument?” “There was division among them,” writes John. Maybe the reason Jesus made the poultice, rather than simply saying, “Your faith has made you well,” was to confound the Pharisees!

The religious hardliners will not let it rest. Maybe the whole miracle is a hoax. Maybe the man was not ever blind at all. They pepper the formerly blind man with questions. They ask him who he thinks Jesus is. “He is a prophet,” he says; a powerful claim linking Jesus with the likes of Elijah and Moses. The Pharisees are none too happy about that and switch to a new approach, trying to undermine the man’s testimony.

They question his parents. “Is this your son?” “Yes.” “Tell us how it is he’s no longer blind.” “We have no idea. Why don’t you ask him?” They call the man a second time. “Tell us this man who healed you is a sinner!” “What would I know about that? All I know is I once was blind, but now I see!” They start to question him again about how, exactly, Jesus healed him. But he says, “I already told you. Why are you asking again? Do *you* want to become his disciples?”

It is a snarky answer, but you can hardly blame the guy. He’s had enough of this. The greatest thing in his life just happened, and these people are more concerned with a handful of mud than a pair of blind eyes that can now see! “If this man were not from God,” he tells them, “he could do nothing!” Whereupon they drive him out, condemning *him* as a sinner.

Now Jesus comes back into the picture. Having heard what the Pharisees did to the man he healed, Jesus seeks him out. Most of the time in the Bible, people come *to* Jesus for healing, but this time the Great Physician goes out searching for his patient. When he finds him, he asks him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he?” the man asks, “Tell me, so I can believe in him.” Jesus answers, “You *have* seen him, and the one speaking to you is he.”

It is tough to decide which half of that sentence is the more remarkable: “you (this formerly blind man) have seen him” or “the one speaking to you is he”? Both are miraculous, and yet two sides of the same coin. The man confesses: “Lord, I believe,” then falls down and worships Jesus. New eyes. That is what the man gets from his encounter with Jesus. New eyes in the physical sense, and new eyes in the spiritual sense as well.

So, what sort of new eyes do we need? I recently admitted that I need special glasses to read. But that is not what I mean. Nor do I mean bifocals or cataract surgery. I am talking about our outlook on life, the ways we see with the eyes of the soul. When we look at the people around us, those we encounter every day, do we see them as small-minded, petty, and otherwise flawed human creatures? Or do we see them as God sees them as Spirit-infused children with infinite potential?

When we look at people different from us, people from another ethnic heritage, or religion, or a different sort of community, do we assume certain things about them based on old prejudices? Or do we approach each encounter open to what God is ready to show us? When we look at the physical world around us, do we see it like a scientist is taught to see it, a place governed by physical laws alone? Or do we see it as the place where God rules, a place where miracles happen? Do we hear in birdsong a hymn of praise, and see in the sunset a benediction?

When we call Jesus to mind, do we see him only as a historical figure, a wise teacher, an ethical example, or a superstar who had a lot of fans in his day? Or do we see him as a risen Lord who walks beside us, who speaks to us of love and compassion, and who guides us in the way we should go? Do we see him as our Lord and our Savior?

He can be those things to us, our Lord and our Savior. He *wants* to be those things for us. He seeks us out, as he sought out that formerly blind man. He asks us if we, too, believe in the Son of Man, and if we know the one speaking to us is he. Do you know that in your own life? Do you really know it, deep in your heart? If you want to know it, then pray to him for the gift of new eyes. For it is a gift he is more than eager to give you.

Prayer: “Jesus, I believe that you are the Son of God and Savior of the world. I believe that you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I believe that through your sacrifice, I am a new person. Forgive me for my sin and fill me with your Spirit. Today, I choose to follow you for the rest of my life as Lord of my life. Amen.”

**New Eyes**

Sunday, March 19, 2023 [John 9:1-41](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+9%3a1-41&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

If you see a word that begins with “presby,” chances are it has something to so with the Presbyterian tradition. Besides the word “Presbyterian,” there is also the word “presbytery,” the regional governing body of that denomination. But it is not an exclusively Presbyterian term. In Roman Catholic churches, “presbytery” is the name of the room where priests put on their vestments. All these words come from the Greek word “presbyter,” which means “elder.” Presbyterian churches are governed by presbyters, elders elected by the congregation. Catholic priests are also known as presbyters, as the office is descended from elders who assisted the local bishop in ancient times.

But there is one word related to “presbyter” that has nothing to do with the church. It is the medical condition known as presbyopia. If you are over the age of 50, chances are pretty good you have it. Presbyopia means “old eyes.” It is the fuzzy vision most of us get as we grow older. It leads us to start using eyeglasses for reading, and eventually for everything else. As surely as presbyopia is about old eyes, today’s gospel lesson from John 9 is about new eyes: specifically, the eyes of a certain blind man whom Jesus heals.

Jesus is walking down the road with his disciples when he meets a man “blind from birth.” Seeing him, the disciples ask their master a theological question: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” In Jesus’ day, most people assumed that any serious health problem or disability was a punishment from God. Blaming the victim was all too common. This man grew up with the world telling him he is cursed. For a great many rabbis of that time, the answer to the disciples’ question is easy. The man has been blind from birth, so it could not possibly be his own sins that made him blind. It can only be the sins of his ancestors.

But Jesus does not provide the typical response, the one the blind man is expecting to hear. Surprisingly, Jesus answers, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned.” This is a break from tradition. Now the man is all ears. Then, Jesus goes on to say, “He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” Be careful not to read too much into that statement. Jesus is not saying God is some sort of monster, visiting blindness upon