

New Creation, or: Is something missing?

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Lent (A), 15th March 2025
at St Sebastian's Cathedral, Magdeburg

John 9:1–11

From the gospel according to John

¹As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. ⁴We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. ⁵While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, ⁷and said to him, "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed, and came back able to see. ⁸His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, "Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some said, "It is," but others said, "No, he just looks like him." He said, "I am." ¹⁰So they said to him, "(So) how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He replied, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went there and washed and was able to see."

"Is something missing?" We sometimes ask people this when we sense they are not doing well. "Is something missing?" Illness is experienced as a kind of "not-being-complete." You are not whole—not fully yourself—there is a lack. That seems to be the case with the man in today's Gospel: he lacks the power of sight—blind from birth, blind from the very beginning. His windows to the world—his eyes—are not open. His participation in life is limited.

"There must be a reason for this," the disciples think. And they suspect that the reason for this impairment lies in guilt, in sin. For someone to be born blind—surely there must be a cause. We, too, not infrequently

ask whether illness or fate must have an explanation: “What have I done to deserve this?” So the disciples ask Jesus in their search for a reason: Who sinned—this man, or his parents? (John 9:2) Misfortune must have a cause—because blindness surely does not belong in a perfect creation. Someone must be responsible that this person is not complete, that something is missing.

Jesus does not go along with that. What the disciples call a consequence of sin is, for Jesus, an opportunity for the greatness and goodness of God to become visible: “the works of God are to be revealed in him” (John 9:3). Ultimately, this man born blind—this wounded man—is the place where Jesus can bring healing: “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world,” he says (cf. John 9:5). And Jesus is in this world to show the goodness and loving-kindness of God (cf. Titus 3:4).

Jesus does not wait—he acts at once. He heals the man born blind and gives him the ability to see. This man, who had never seen before, this man to whom a sense—the sense of sight—was missing, becomes complete. He is allowed to experience this world with all his senses: complete, healed, whole.

The way Jesus heals seems rather unusual—at least to our ears. A paste made from saliva and the earth of the ground. Jesus spreads it on the man’s eyes and sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam. “So the man went and washed, and came back able to see.” (John 9:7)

In these few sentences, readers of John’s Gospel hear many allusions that tell us something about the nature of this healing. Let us decode them:

For an ancient person, being touched with saliva was an expression of particular closeness. Saliva was far more than a mere bodily fluid. It was regarded as a substance with magical, healing, and protective powers—a kind of “concentrated life force” coming directly from within a person. In other words: Jesus places his own inner power into it.

Jesus takes earth to make a paste with his saliva. This recalls God's act of creation as the book of Genesis tells it: "Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." (Gen 2:7) Here, with this man born blind, Jesus continues creation and adds—very concretely to this man's creation—what was still missing. He gives him the power of sight.

And the place of the miracle is the washing in the pool of Siloam. This pool was fed by a living spring—so there was always fresh water. In Jerusalem it served not only for water supply but also as a ritual immersion bath for pilgrims who wished to visit the Temple—functionally similar to what a mikveh is in a synagogue today. The washing made one clean in order to meet God. And when the man born blind takes this bath, he can see. For Christian readers—and that is why we hear this text today in preparation for Easter—the washing in Siloam was also a symbol of the new creation and healing that come with baptism: after baptism—to stand before God, gifted with all the senses.

That John highlights in his Gospel that the word "Siloam" means "Sent One" can only mean this: Jesus is the One sent by God to bring healing. With his life-giving power he continues creation, so that you may live with all your senses.

Dear brothers and sisters, all of us—you and I—experience that our lives are incomplete, that something is missing. Whether it is physical health, or the health of our relationships; whether it is trauma that lies within us, or entanglements of guilt that we have carried for a long time. There may be darkness; there may be situations in which these experiences and memories prevent us from seeing clearly—so that they rob us of our sight. Yet Jesus said: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (John 9:5) And he wants to accomplish the work of the One who sent him. (cf. John 9:4) He wants to recreate you.

He wants to make complete what is incomplete in you—what is missing in you. Allow him to make you new.

Dear brothers and sisters, perhaps a suggestion: you know your blind spots. You know where you are incomplete. You can hold that—honestly—before Jesus, the Sent One, the Light of the world. Find a quiet place; take a little time—perhaps in the morning—and tell him about it as you would tell a friend, a friend with whom you can pour out your inmost self. You do not have to do more than that—just let it happen: in you the works of God are to be revealed!

By Deacon Thomas

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