

## ***Amazing Grace* - Sermon Based on John 9:1-41**

by David Hindman on Sunday, April 3, 2011

Even if we've never attended a worship service or believe in God, there's one Christian song most know and love: "Amazing Grace," written by John Newton, a slave ship captain. Toward the end of his life, Newton wrote, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior." Until Christ touched his life he had been blind to God, blind to the awesome accountability of life, blind to the terrible cost of his wealth, blind to the humanity of his cargo. But God's rich mercy healed him when Christ's hand was laid on him and his eyes were opened.

Today's scripture partly inspired Newton's hymn. Jesus' disciples see a man and want to know if his blindness is due to his sin and wrongdoing or his parents'. Whose fault is it? Jesus chooses C – none of the above. His blindness is not an occasion to play the blame game, but to do something to let the light of God's love be seen. His suffering isn't to be blamed but healed. And that's not just Jesus' job. Jesus says, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work." God's work is something *we* do, too. And we do it passionately, because time is flying. Even if we live as long as John Newton's 82 years, our day will soon end and our life's light will be quenched. Life's too short to be taken lightly.

Jesus takes some dirt and spit and kneads it into a paste and puts it on the man's eyes. And in a wonderful play on words, the one sent by God to save and heal the world sends the blind man to wash in a pool named "Sent." Now here's something odd – the man doesn't ask to be healed. He doesn't even know who Jesus is. But Jesus comes to

him, takes over his body and does with it what he wants, and sends him on his way toward sight. Sometimes Jesus comes to us uninvited and unexpected to do his work of healing. It's what John Wesley called prevenient grace – the amazing grace that touches our life before we know what it is and sends us on to new sight and life. Sometimes the healing ways of Jesus are weirdly messy. But when he puts his hands on us, we have to decide whether we will do what he says. And by the amazing grace of God, the man goes where he's sent and is healed and made new. So new that people who've known him all his life don't recognize him. And that just starts his troubles.

Jesus does this healing on the Sabbath and a hot debate ensues. Breaking the Sabbath is a sin because it's contrary to God's will and purposes for humanity, so Jesus must be a sinner. But if he is, how could he do such an amazing healing? The story begins to feel like a crime scene investigation with the man and his parents being questioned. But the questions help the man have a clearer understanding of what happened and who his healer is. He moves in the story from seeing Jesus as a man to a prophet to Lord of all. It's good to know that our understanding Jesus can also develop and deepen. That's why it's important for us to share *our* faith story even if it's partial and incomplete. Tell others how Christ has touched our lives and in the telling we'll also see more clearly who he is for us.

Here's the worst part of this story: everyone except the man loses sight of what really matters. During the investigation the parents and religious leaders focus on who did what. Was a law broken? Who's this Jesus and what's his relationship with God?

And everyone's blind to the wonderful fact that sight's been restored. Where's the joy? Where's the gratitude? Where's the celebration even if there are more questions than answers. Only the man sees what's important, "All I know is that I was blind, and now I see." Amazing grace, lost in the quest for religion where everything fits together nicely. God save us from missing the point and being blind ourselves to what truly matters.

It's interesting that in the story, when all the conflict and questioning are happening Jesus is nowhere to be found. It's almost like Jesus says, "If you're going to spend all your time fussing and feuding over things like this, I have better things to do. Perhaps that's why Jesus seems absent when churches focus on the wrong things and make traditions or budgets or church membership or fighting over trivial theological issues their main thing. They're blind to what truly matters: doing the work of him who sends us into the world. Bringing light and life to the lost and groping. Trusting Christ's truth enough to live his ways now and seeing where he is still at work in the world. God save *us* from blindly failing to see what truly matters.

Or maybe the blind man left on his own is symbolic of our reality now. Sometimes wonder where Jesus is or feel like we Christ followers have to fend for ourselves. We face our own interrogators: where is your God? In a multi-faith or no faith world, why Jesus? Does he really heal or is it a trick? We can feel so overwhelmed and our answers can seem so inadequate or unconvincing. But we don't have to convince others. All we have to do is tell our story and share our experience and let them decide whether it's true. All I know is that I was blind, and now I see. All I know is that I was a racist and

now I have a new multi-colored family. All I know is that alcohol ruled my life and now I have a job. All I know is that I thought money could buy happiness and now I know that giving me away is the best way to go. All I know is that I thought forgiveness was for wimps and now I know that holding onto grudges paralyzed me and Christ has helped me walk a different way.

In the end, Jesus didn't forsake the blind man and he won't fail us either. In his moment of crisis Jesus finds the man and invites him into a deeper relationship. And he is here for us who want to see clearly and find a better way. He comes to make us family where we are never forsaken or thrown out to fend for ourselves. He is God with us always, light in a dark world.

I love the lively discussion and debate within our Christian scripture. The Bible is a conversation of many voices telling how they've heard the voice of the one God we meet in Jesus. Somewhere in all the words we hear the Word of God for us, if we have ears to hear. So today Jesus puts an interesting twist on the idea of sin. Usually we see sin as doing wrong or breaking God's law and God as the judge who throws the book at us. And there's truth in that. But in John's gospel God doesn't come to us in the Son to be our judge but our savior. The way John sees it, God's not our judge. *We* are. We see Jesus' deeds and hear his words. And then *we* judge whether we think he's true. Will we stake our lives on his teachings? Will we go where he sends and live his way? Jesus is the clearest picture we have of God for John. The God he sees in Jesus is ultimately a God of love and forgiveness and amazing grace who wants to make a home in us and be

as near as breath itself. Jesus says he's the light of the world shining God's love and life. We judge if he's living truth. And if we don't see it, we're as blind and doomed as other religious folks long ago who just couldn't see it and missed the gift.

This story reminded the early church of baptism because of the connection between water, healing and new sight. They even called the baptized the enlightened who saw Jesus and his way clearly; or the illuminated who let God's love and mercy shine in them. In baptism Jesus puts his hands on us. Healing waters wash over us who were born blind so our eyes see at last. While it is still day may we see afresh where we can join God's work of healing and hope. Don't be blinded by the light - see and share the real life and amazing grace of God here and now, for us and for all. Christ is the Light of the world: Lord, open my eyes that *I* may see.