

One Thing I Know

Isaiah 49:1-6, John 9:1-41 (ESV)

April 8, 2007

“Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” Here is joy almost beyond expression. Here is faith. Here is knowledge. Here is gratitude. Here is witness. Here is new life. Here is first sight. Here is a new person. Here is a new believer. Here is a new Christian. Here is the impact of the power of the resurrection even in this life. Here, again, is joy. “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

And today even we who are sighted are invited into this great healing, into this new life, and into this new faith. We who can see are invited into this new life and into this new faith if only we admit our blindness, our neediness, and our faithlessness. Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.” That is our predicament in this life. The more we think we see, the blinder we are. The more we think we know, the more ignorant we are. The more we think we are good, the more sinful we are. The more we think we are alive, the more we plummet toward death. “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.” So even we yet today are invited into first sight, into saving faith, and so into new life only by way of admitting our blindness and neediness.

“As he [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth.” The man did not call out to Jesus. He did not ask for help. He did not worship him. He may not have been aware of him. Are we aware of him passing by in our lives? But Jesus saw the man blind from birth, and his seeing him led to the man’s seeing, his seeing led to the man’s believing, his seeing led to the man’s becoming a disciple, and his seeing led to the man’s salvation and new life. Lord, look on us! All the initiative was on the part of Jesus. All the response, all the obedience, was on the part of the man. He did without question what Jesus told him to do. Can we follow his good example, clinging to, trusting in, and obeying the bare word of God?

The disciples appear only once in this reading, at the very beginning. They attempt to reduce the poor man to an object of their theological speculation about the relationship of sin and suffering. “Rabbi,”—hardly an appropriate way to address Jesus—“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” How often do we do the same today? Jesus dismisses their easy assumptions and replaces them with a much more disturbing answer: “It was not that this man

sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” The works of God? The disciples are silenced and do not appear again in today’s reading. Can we blame them? This man had been blind from birth not because he sinned or his parents sinned, “but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” I find that terrifying. I find that much more disturbing than the easy relationship between sin and suffering. Surely we sinners deserve to suffer! But Jesus said, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” And then, thank God, Jesus displayed the works of God in this poor man by restoring his sight and bringing him to faith, discipleship, life, and salvation. God Almighty has come to earth and is present in the works and words of Jesus Christ. That was true then. It continues to be true today. Come, Lord Jesus, and display the works of God even in us!

It is disruptive when the blind see. It is disruptive when the silent speak. It is disruptive when the lame walk, when the poor become rich, when the friendless are sought out, and especially when the dead live. Has it not always been so? Everyone wanted to know what had happened. The man gave them a straightforward report, but it seemed not to satisfy them. Initial skepticism was swept aside by the sheer facts of the case. The man asserted, and his parents confirmed, both that he had been born blind and also that his sight had been restored. Not satisfied with this, the powers that were asserted that some criminality had been involved. “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath,” and, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” This exemplifies an old strategy, that when you cannot win on the facts, assault the person and his character. But it was to no avail.

Here we reach the high point of today’s reading. The man answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” If you can know one thing, what could be more wonderful than that? “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” How did he know that? He knew that because Jesus healed him. How did he know that he had been blind? Not only because he had been blind, but even more in the contrast with his new seeing, because Jesus restored his sight. How did he know that he could see? Because seeing light is a self-authenticating experience which no amount of naysaying can take away, and seeing the light of the world is a life-giving experience which no amount of naysaying can take away. Conversely, those who rejected what he had to say could not see the light and so confirmed their continuing blindness precisely by denying to be blind. They rejected the divine nature of Jesus Christ and so refused the healing he brings. Lord, help us!

The man answered them, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens

to him. 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.” Again, “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” On the basis of his knowing that once he had been blind but then he saw, this man concluded that Jesus was from God. This man concluded that his Savior was from the Creator. This man concluded that Jesus Christ was to be believed and followed. This man concluded that he owed his life to Jesus Christ. This man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. Dare we do any less? Dare we who now know that Jesus was raised from the dead do any less than the man blind from birth who was given sight?

Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” Thus consider our predicament in this life. The more we think we see, the blinder we are. The more we think we know, the more ignorant we are. The more we think we are good, the more sinful we are. The more we think we are alive, the more we plummet toward death. Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.” So today even we who are physically sighted are invited into this great healing of the blind man, into this new life of the former beggar, and into this saving faith of one who became a follower of Christ, if only we admit our spiritual blindness, our neediness, and our faithlessness.

Would you like to know joy beyond expression? Do you want faith? Do you seek knowledge? Do you yearn for gratitude? Would you dare to bear witness? Do you need new life? Do you strive for first sight? Are you willing to become a new person? Can you affirm the faith and be a believer? Are you willing to bear the name Christian? Would you like to know the impact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ already in this life, in addition to the life to come? Then know this: “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

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