

ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Jn. 9:1-38

“The Ultimate Encounter”

RRR WEEKEND & THE HEALING SERVICES

This is our sixth annual *Rock, Rods and Relationships* weekend. Yesterday at the main event we had great weather, moving testimonies, classic cars on display and most importantly a healing service. Today we also have healing services at both our 8 and 10 AM services.

God is in the healing business. In fact, that is why Christ came: to restore that which is broken. And all of human history is leading to that point when God restores all that He has made when the Lord Jesus Christ returns and establishes God’s Kingdom forever once and for all.

But when we talk about healing in the Scriptures it is not an end to itself. It is a means to something greater. And this is clearly brought out in our Gospel lesson from John 9. A man blind from birth doesn’t just receive healing he has an encounter with the Living God and his life will never be the same.

To encounter means to meet unexpectedly. Someone has described it as a *collision with the unexpected*. I wonder if you have had a God encounter before? The truth is if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit lives in you. And there will be times when you have a collision with the unexpected. When you all of a sudden come face to face with the Living God and your life is changed. It may be a change on the inside or around and about you. It could be in the form of a miracle, or a revelation God puts in your spirit. And this God encounter is meant to grow your spirit and faith in Christ. But there is also, one who seeks to rob, kill and destroy. Do you remember what Jesus said in **John 10:10**: *“The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy; I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*

Who’s the thief? The devil. And he seeks to rob us of what God is trying to do in our lives for good. That’s exactly what happens to the blind man in John 9. He is touched by Jesus, but at the same time he hears **five voices** that are seeking to rob him of His God encounter. And these same voices are with us today. Look now at the first verses of our lesson: *“And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man blind from his birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?”*

THE VOICE OF REASON

The first voice comes from the disciples themselves. They want to know why the man is blind and they seek to find blame. There are many things we don’t understand in this life – why bad things happen to good people or why do miracles happen to some and not to others. But if we get bogged down with the

questions we will end up being good for nothing. Have you ever run into a person who always has to have the answers. This is the voice of reason. This is the way of rationalism, intellectualism, and logic. And while it has its place in life's journey if it is all we listen to then we are in trouble. This voice will rob you of what God is trying to do in your life. The truth is there is much in life we don't understand but God says believe. God says believe and don't stop believing. **Hebrews 11:3** says that **"without faith it is impossible to please God for He who comes to God must believe that He exists and is a rewarder of those who seek Him."**

Not only did the disciples get bogged down in the questions, they came to the wrong conclusion! They ask, **"Who sinned, this man or his parents?"** They're looking at the problem and assume that the blind man or his parents are at fault. They don't see the man for who he is, rather they look at his outward appearances and immediately make a harsh judgment.

Jesus, on the other hand, sees a man born blind – He sees someone with a problem but He is willing to do something about it. He replies: **"Neither this man sinned or his parents but that the works of God be revealed in Him."** Isn't that great? Jesus is looking at his blindness as an opportunity to do a good work in the man's life. More important, His blindness will be used to glorify God. God is a good God who is there for us and this will be a chance to show it.

I must also add, this teaches us that most sickness is not the direct result of personal sin. While some sickness is the result of our choices or even the choices of others, for the most part the sicknesses we get are not because of our own individual sin but are the result of our genes and our environment. And why is this - both are cursed because of the Fall. This world of ours is not a perfect or righteous place. Far from it. Everything and everyone is tainted by the curse of sin. The sooner we realize this the sooner we will be able to put our own lives and the lives of others, the life of this planet back together. Too often people think God is punishing them. God is not punishing you, God is a good God and wants you to get through it with His help.

You see that man's blindness had a purpose. It was to teach himself, those around him and the whole world about who God really is. In fact then Jesus says, in verse 5 **"While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."**

And this man's blindness wasn't merely physical, it was a spiritual blindness that everyone in the passage and everyone in our world has. Notice that the blind man doesn't ask Jesus to heal him. But Jesus tells the man, **"Go, wash in the pool of Siloam"** (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came *back* seeing. He had an opportunity to demonstrate faith. He was sent and He went. Some people are sent but they don't "went."

And sadly, often times people in the church are sent, but they don't move, they never go, they are never ready. And they often miss the God encounter that could birth something or change something for

the better. Jesus is about bringing answers, bringing solutions that stem from faith in the Living God. And you can't do that if you listen to the voice of reason.

THE VOICE OF FAMILIARITY

Now look at verse 8. *⁸Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Others were saying, "This is he," still others were saying, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the one." ¹⁰So they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?"*

After the blind man is healed, he is confronted by some of his neighbors and those who knew him as a beggar. They knew him the way he was. And they couldn't believe that such a thing would happen to such a man. They represent the voice of familiarity. This is the voice that comes from your own household or church or workplace.

They say familiarity breeds contempt. When you get used to the way things have always been or the way people always are, or when you fall into the trap of just going through the motions, such a state will often block off the possibility of a God encounter. Remember how Jesus couldn't do any miracles in his own hometown of Nazareth? He said a prophet without honor in his own hometown. I am sure that many viewed Jesus as just a local guy, a carpenter's son. And do you know what the result was? Jesus could do no miracles there. Don't let familiarity rob you of the power of what God wants to do in your life. Don't think that just because things have always been a certain way, they have to remain a certain way.

THE VOICE OF RELIGION - v. 13

The third voice is the voice of the Pharisees and they represent the voice of the religion. Faith in Christ is not about religion, but it is about a *relationship* with the Living God. Notice what happens next:

"They brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet."

Here the Pharisees get so caught up in the fact that the blind man was healed on the Sabbath, that they didn't even recognize the incredible miracle of a blind man regaining his sight! Why? They were more concerned with their religious rule and regulations that the true things of God were ignored. Such legalism will cut you off from encountering God. Encountering God doesn't come from religion or from

keeping laws or rituals, it comes from a relationship. I mean, how can you lose the power of a God encounter because you were locked in to the fact that it happened on the Sabbath? I’ll tell you how: when you major on the minors; when you take pride in your own righteousness or religious knowledge, when you can’t move forward to believe in something greater than you because you put the Living God in a box! The truth is what God does is out of the box. And a Miracle is out of the box. A revelation of what you can do in Jesus Christ is out of the box.

THE VOICE OF UNBELIEF

Now we come to another robber - the fourth voice. And it comes from the man’s own fellow Jews – the religious lay folk. We read in verse 18, ***“The Jews then did not believe it of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight.”*** Unbelief is such a robber and it most often comes from within yourself. That spirit of unbelief will always restrict. And it can come to any Christian – when you start to doubt God’s promises in His Word; when you forget what God has shown you in an encounter with Him. Unbelief takes you down a road of failure and futility. It will rob you of the power of a God encounter. A God encounter is meant to take you on an opposite journey. In fact, the blind man’s faith increases throughout the passage. He first sees Jesus as a man, then a prophet, then a man sent from God, and then finally Lord!

THE VOICE OF FEAR

There is one more voice that is a robber. It is the voice of fear. And where did this voice come from? From his own parents. Even though their son was healed, the fear of man caused them to distance themselves from the miracle. They should have been excited and thrilled and telling everyone. But instead they respond as if they were releasing a press statement.

“and questioned them, saying, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?” His parents answered them and said, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself.” (They might as well have added: *“And we ask you to please respect the privacy of our family during this difficult time.”*)

Why did they respond this way? The Scriptures says: ***“His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, “Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner.”***

They were more afraid of man, then of proclaiming the good news about their son. What are you afraid of? The voice of fear. It is a robber. The voice of unbelief – a robber; the voice of religion – it is a

rober; the voice of familiarity – a robber! And so is the voice trying to rationalize the things of God is a robber! What voice is trying to undermine a God encounter you have experienced?

The Word says in **2 Tim. 1:7**, "*God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, and love and of a sound mind.* Don't lose the joy of what God is doing in your life!

Finally, when confronted by the Jews once more, the blind man simply explains what happens to himself again and then goes ahead and says that they have the problem for not recognizing the good that has been done. And he must be somewhat familiar with Scriptures when he says *we know anyone who is God-fearing and does God's will is heard by God.* But they answered him, "*You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?*" *So they put him out.*"

A GOD ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS CHRIST

When Jesus hears that they had put him out, He goes out to find him. Jesus did not forget about the man. In fact, He asks him, "*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*" The blind man undoubtedly heard the prophecies of Daniel. Of the Son of Man coming to earth to establish God's Kingdom forever; a Divine Figure to whom all nations would serve and worship. He replies, "*Who is He? That I may believe in Him.*" *And Jesus says, "You have both seen Him and have talked to Him."*

What an incredible encounter. So much so that not only does the man say "*Lord, I believe,*" but we are told that "*He worships Jesus.*" The man goes from seeing Jesus as a man, to a prophet, to a man sent from God, to seeing Him as Lord of heaven and earth. He experienced Jesus in Person, and his life was transformed.

Jesus accepted worship by this man because Jesus is the Living God in the flesh! And any good Jew would know that there is only one God and He alone deserves praise and worship. So even though the man was healed, it wasn't until He recognized Who Jesus was and worshipped Him that he truly was spiritually healed. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world." Worship is not something we do out of compulsion or obligation, it is natural response to the overwhelming sense of God's Person, Presence and Power. Healing takes us to that place. And while a God encounter may involve physical healing, what's most important is being connected to the One who heals us completely. For the truth is physical healing in this realm is only temporary, but spiritual healing is eternal and that spiritual healing will take us to complete physical healing when we go from this life to the next.

And that is what is offered to us today. To trust and worship Jesus Christ. To get to know Jesus. To have a God encounter that will transform us from the inside out. In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN!