

**Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity**

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the third Chapter of Baruch.²

“... Learn where is wisdom, where is strength, where is understanding; that thou mayest know also where is length of days, and life, where is the light of the eyes, and peace. Who hath found out her place? or who hath come into her treasures? ... Who hath gone up into heaven, and taken her, and brought her down from the clouds? Who hath gone over the sea, and found her, and will bring her for pure gold? No man knoweth her way, nor thinketh of her path. But he that knoweth all things knoweth her, and hath found her out with his understanding: he that prepared the earth for evermore hath filled it with fourfooted beasts: He that sendeth forth light, and it goeth, calleth it again, and it obeyeth him with fear. The stars shined in their watches, and rejoiced: when he calleth them, they say, Here we be; and so with cheerfulness they shewed light unto him that made them. This is our God, and there shall none other be accounted of in comparison of him. He hath found out all the way of knowledge, and hath given it unto Jacob his servant, and to Israel his beloved. Afterward did he shew himself upon earth, and conversed with men.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.³

“And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work

the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

“The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he. Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened? He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight. Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not.

“They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see. Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet. But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself. These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him. Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner. He answered and said, Whether he be a

what Jesus thinks of you. He alone has the authority to admit you to His eternal presence or to send you off by yourself where you really are an outcast. Jesus himself says, “Fear not them that kill the body but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

The psalmist says, “In God have I put my trust. I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.” (56:4.) And again, “The Lord is on my side. I will not fear what man can do to me.” (118:6.) St. Paul says to his critics in the Corinthian church, “It is a small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human tribunal. I do not even judge myself.... It is the Lord who judges me.”

The man in the story was willing to be banished from the synagogue for his witness to the power of Christ. The whole Christian community, to whom the Fourth Gospel was directed, was likewise banished and persecuted by the religious elite. The Apostles and many others were executed for their testimony before the political rulers of the day. But Christ sustained every one of them and endowed them with His own glory. So shall He do with all of you who have the courage to testify boldly to what Jesus has meant in your life.

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St. David's Anglican Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² *Baruch* 3: 14-15, 29-37 (KJV).

³ St. John 9: 1-38 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 9: 6-7 (RSV).

alone and unsupported. He will not leave you that way either when you give your testimony.

“Do you believe in the Son of Man?” asked Jesus. “Who is he?” asked the man. “I am,” replied Jesus. In that little exchange, Jesus not only gave the man new insight, He also claimed to be the only one who had a right to judge the man. He assured him that it really didn’t matter what the elite might say or what anybody might think. The only opinion that mattered was the judgment of The Son of Man.

The Son of Man is a figure in the book of Daniel who comes in the clouds of heaven, as Jesus did in his ascension. He stands before the throne of The Ancient of Days, and is given the authority to judge the nations of the world.

When we say in the in the creed that Jesus shall come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead, this is what we are saying. He is the One who sits upon the throne of glory in the famous 25th chapter of St. Matthew’s gospel and passes judgement on the world, dividing the sheep from the goats, admitting the sheep to His Kingdom and casting the goats into the everlasting fire.

And just to drive that point home, I will read one verse beyond where the New Testament reading stopped.

“And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I am come into the world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind.’”

I have told my wife and my children that there is to be no eulogy at my funeral. I will not have my life evaluated, not even favorably, by anyone other than The Son of Man, and neither should you.

It doesn’t really matter what other people think of you. It doesn’t even matter what you think of yourself. What matters is

sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples? Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses’ disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is. The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing. They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[H]e spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man’s eyes with the clay, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.”⁴

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

Like many things in St. John’s Gospel, the washing that takes place in this morning’s New Testament lesson is highly sym-

bolic. The man who is cured represents all of us in our natural state – unable to see the truth, unable to perceive many things about the world we live in, unable even to perceive many things about ourselves until Jesus opens our eyes.

We are creatures of dust, as we learn from Genesis, and Jesus begins to cure this man by imposing on him the symbol of his created nature, just as every priest does on Ash Wednesday. Jesus takes the dust of the earth, holds it together with his own spittle, places it over the man's flawed eyes, and tells him to go and wash it off.

This is baptismal imagery. We pray in the baptismal rite that the child or adult may be given what he does not have in the natural state into which he is born. So the man washes off his old nature as symbolized by the mud and emerges from the water whole. He is able to see. He has a new life.

But he still has to grow into that new life. When asked what he believes about Jesus the man said, "He is a prophet." It was not until later that he fully recognized the divinity of Jesus and worshiped him.

Nevertheless the man became an evangelist, as all baptized people should. Now when I say that, you may think of someone on television waving an open bible and soliciting contributions. But that's not what I mean by an evangelist. I don't even mean someone preaching on a street corner or knocking on doors to ask people if they are saved. What the word "evangelist" really means in its classical sense is someone who announces good news. In this case the good news was that the man had been healed and made whole by Jesus.

All of you can be evangelists in that sense, and you should be. All you have to do is testify to your own experience. Often the opportunity to do that emerges when someone asks you why you do things so many people do not do – simple things like why you

attend church every week even if you have to miss a golf outing or a soccer game, or why you say grace a meals even in restaurants.

The man in the story paid a price for his testimony, and sometimes you may have to as well. At the time this gospel was written, the leaders of the Jewish religion had agreed among themselves that anyone who confessed Jesus as a prophet, much less as the Messiah, would be expelled from the synagogues and treated as an outcast.

That is why the man's parents were so careful about their testimony. They were willing to confirm that the man who had been healed was their son, and that he had indeed been blind from birth. Beyond that they were unwilling to say anything. "He is of age," they said, "ask him what happened."

In our society today, you are likewise in danger of becoming an outcast if you dare to testify in public about your faith in Jesus. People shun you. People mock you. People question your intelligence as well as your integrity. Is that a price you are willing to pay?

The elite scholars in the story had no respect either for Jesus or for his witness. They assumed that since Jesus, who was not one of them he could not have done what the man said he did. When the man defended his position, they replied "Thou was altogether born in sin, and would you teach us?" The elite in our society say pretty much the same thing to those of us whom they consider to be ignorant and gullible.

But the man stuck to his story. He could not deny his own experience, and he would not let others deny it either. So he was in fact ejected from the synagogue and consigned to the margins of society.

But then a wonderful thing happened. Jesus himself sought him out and came to him and strengthened his faith. Jesus does that all the time. He does not leave His witnesses hanging out