

Amazing Grace is a hymn that everybody loves. I'm sure many of you could probably even sing it in your sleep! But the first stanza of that hymn includes a line that comes from our reading for today: "Amazing grace—how sweet the sound— / That saved a wretch like me! / I once was lost but now am found, / Was blind but now I see!" And so we sing that it is the grace of God that causes us to see. It is the grace of God which has delivered us from our sins.

But how do we know, Christians, that we are able to see? How do we know that we aren't just thinking that we can see? Because our Gospel reading for today, the very same reading that the hymn pulls that line from, shows us that it is quite possible to be blind when in fact we think that we can see. So we have to ask, then: what does it mean to see? And what does it mean to be blind?

So in the beginning of John chapter 9, Jesus heals a man who had been born blind using a mighty miracle to do it. John tells us that Jesus spits onto the ground. He uses his spit to make some mud, and he puts that mud on the man's eyes. He then tells the man to go to the pool of Siloam and to wash. And the man does everything that Jesus tells him to do. And by the time that he gets back, he is no longer blind. But the problem is that Jesus is also no longer there.

So everybody's confused. They're not quite sure what just happened. Is this really the blind man? Is this really the same man that we all know? In fact, we're told in John 9, verse 9: "Some said, 'It is he.' Others said, 'No, but he is like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.'" And of course, this confusion is very understandable. How would we feel if somebody who was blind suddenly was able to see again? Or if somebody who was unable to walk suddenly just walked right into the room? We would also be confused. We would want to know what it is that had just happened. But the problem was that no one was quite sure who Jesus was. The man born blind himself didn't know who Jesus was at this point. All he knew was what Jesus had done for him. He knew that he had been blind, but now he can see. And so everybody's talking about it. They're trying to figure it out, because this is an amazing thing that Jesus has done!

But everybody keeps talking, and pretty soon the Pharisees get involved. They're also trying to figure out what happened. But the thing is that they were convinced in their own minds that this had to be some kind of trick, that this had to be maybe even something evil. Because they thought in their own minds that Jesus was a sinner. We're told in verse 14 that "it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes." And in the mind of the Pharisees, that meant that Jesus had been working on the Sabbath. And if he was working on the Sabbath, he had broken their laws, and their laws had come from God! So that meant that this man was a sinner. So there had to be some other explanation, some other reason why he was able to do this. But they try something else first. They go to the man's parents, and they asked them, "Is this, in fact, your son?" Maybe that would explain it, right? Maybe people just got confused. Maybe they just had him confused for somebody else. This is all one big misunderstanding. Simple, easy, case solved. Except his parents said that, yes, it was him, except they weren't really quite sure how he could see now either. And so they were back to square one. They had to find some other explanation.

So we get to our reading for today, then. The Pharisees are talking to the man born blind for the second time. "Give glory to God," they say. It's their way of saying, "Tell the truth. We know that something else is really going on here, because we know that this man is a sinner. Had he not

broken the Law? Had he not desecrated the Sabbath? That shows who he truly is!" The man born blind says in verse 25: "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." So he still doesn't really know who Jesus is, but he holds on to what he does know: that he can now see.

The Pharisees can't deny that either. They can't deny that something miraculous has happened here, something quite amazing. But because they're convinced that they already know that Jesus is not from God, they're looking for some other explanation. "After all, Moses came from God," they say. "We know Moses speaks for him. But as for this man, we do not know where he is from." Any answer at all would be acceptable to them except the obvious one that Jesus has come from God.

So the man born blind gives an argument, then, a really quite solid argument. He says in verse 31: "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." So he says, first of all, God does not listen to sinners, and that much is true. If we are walking contrary to God's Law, if we are constantly fighting back against him, we have no expectation to be heard, no right to think that we're going to be heard. God's promises are meant for those who come to him in faith. Psalm 66, for example, says: "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." So sinners could not do what Jesus has done. That's his first point.

His second point is that God hears the prayers of the righteous and that he does mighty things through his people. Think of Elijah, for example, or think of Elisha raising up the dead. Think of Moses parting the Red Sea. All of those things were far beyond what is normal, what is ordinary. Those things came from God. And they only happened because God listens to the prayers of the righteous. So if something like this has happened, it must be from God.

His third point comes in verse 32, when he says: "Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind." This one's even far beyond an ordinary miracle. This one is so spectacular that it could only have come from God. All of this goes to show that, whoever this Jesus is, he is no sinner. He has come from God, and he has done these things through him. That's why he says, verse 33: "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." He might not be quite sure who Jesus is, but he is willing to see the truth.

The Pharisees want nothing of it. They don't want to admit it. They don't want to even admit his argument. They already know the truth. They already know that this man hasn't come from God. They're not going to listen to anything else. And so they're going to continue to be disciples of Moses. They are going to continue to truly follow after God. And so they cast this man out. Claiming to be able to see the truth, they have become blind, and they have turned away from God because of it.

Jesus now comes to the man born blind and reveals himself to him. The man born blind now sees Jesus for who he truly is: the Son of God who has come into the world. And so he confesses his faith in him and worships him, because he is willing to follow the truth when it's right in front of him.

Christians, now we can understand what it means to see and what it means to be blind. Because Jesus is not talking about physical blindness here, but a spiritual blindness. To be able to see spiritually means to follow after the truth of God. It means to accept what he has to say, to accept that Jesus is truly the Son of God, to accept that Jesus is truly the Lord. But seeing the truth spiritually also means seeing ourselves rightly, because the trouble with the Pharisees was their blindness towards themselves. They were convinced that they were righteous. They were convinced that they had done nothing wrong. They were convinced that they were disciples of Moses, and because of it, they turned away from Jesus. They were blind to the truth even though it was right in front of them. They were led away from God even as they claimed to follow him. They were blind, thinking that they could see. The man born blind did not deny the truth. He accepted it, and he followed after Jesus and came to him by faith.

Christians, do we always see the truth about ourselves? Are we willing to admit that we are, in fact, sinners by nature? Are we willing to admit all of our sins, all of them that we have done, no matter what they may be? I know that's very easy to do in a general sense. It's very easy for us to say that we've messed up here or there. It's very easy to say that we're not quite perfect, that we're not quite what we should be. But are we willing to admit that we have done things wrong specifically? If we were looking back over the past week, would we be willing to admit our specific sins? Would we be willing to admit that our anger was unjust? Would we be willing to admit that our thoughts about that other person were impure? Would we be willing to admit that we were in the wrong when it came to whatever it was that we were arguing about? Are we even willing to admit that our actions this morning have not been what they should be? It is all too easy, Christians, to think that we can see when we are, in fact, blind. It is sadly all too easy to think that we are well off, that there is nothing that we really need to repent of, except maybe the little things or a few general things. But in such a case, we have become blind. God save us from such blindness!

But Jesus comes today so that we can see ourselves rightly. Jesus comes so that we can confess that we are sinners in need of grace. Jesus comes so that we can confess that we should've done this or we should've said that. Jesus comes so that we can confess that not everything that we have done is what it should be, even the things that we have done for God. But by confessing our sins, Christians, we see Jesus rightly too, because then we will see him as a Savior, not just of little things or of general things, but a Savior for the specific things that we have done. We can find the grace of God when we see the truth about ourselves.

So turn to Jesus, Christians. Confess your sins. Even when it hurts to do it, confess what you have done wrong. And you will find grace in Jesus who saves specific sinners. And then you will be able to say, just like in the hymn, that "I once was blind, but now I see!"

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, who is faithful and just to forgive the sins of those who call on you and to cleanse all their unrighteousness, open our eyes to see ourselves rightly, and forgive us for the things that we have done against you, so that we may walk with you in newness of life; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.