

Sermon for 03/02/08

*Lent Wk 4, Between the Spitting and the Washing-
John 9:1-42, (RW02)*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, AMEN

THEME: When Jesus anointed the blind-man with the healing mud, there was still a time of waiting while he made his way to the pool and his sight was restored. It is between the spitting and the washing, when we still cannot see, that the gift of faith helps us to endure, follow God's instructions, and eventually receive spiritual sight!

Page 7 = Gospel Reading

1) SPITTING AND WASHING! This week we went to the movies and ran across a couple we used to know when we attended a large church *long* before I became a pastor. The wife asked me "***How is All Saints doing?***" As I was hunting for the words, she quickly went on to say, "**Our pastor has been telling us just how hard it is for small churches to make the adjustments necessary to grow in a changing world." Wow – her pastor was right on. There are small ELCA churches *closing down* all around us, and other ELCA churches that are beginning the ***hard climb*** towards growth. ***Which are we?*** Before I could answer, her husband asked Charlotte a funny question that made us all laugh, and the original question was forgotten. All week I have been wondering how I would have answered that question, (had the interruption not occurred). And then, as I studied the text for this Sunday, I found the answer. "**ASLC is right between the **spitting** and the **washing!****"**

2) ANNOINTING AND SEEING! "*Woe, Pastor, did you say our church is between the **spitting** and the **washing**? What does that mean?*" Well, look at the Gospel lesson today. Jesus took some **spit** and made **mud** and applied it to the blind man's eyes, right? But did the man see clearly **immediately**? *Of course not.* He was told to go to the **Pool of Siloam** and **wash his eyes**. Now let me tell you, this was no easy chore! Anyone who has been to the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem has said **walking** there from anywhere in the city is **not easy** – even for a sighted person, yet alone a blind man. But something **drove him on** and when he arrived, he **washed**, and he began to **see** – to **see clearly**. Well, that's what I'm talking about when I discuss the time between the "**spitting**" and the "**washing**". It's the time between the **anointing** of God and the **ability to see clearly**.

3) MUD SLINGING GOD! See, when **God slings mud**, it isn't like the **mud slinging** that goes on here on earth. Politicians using lies and slander to smear their opponents reputation - that's **negative "mud slinging."** Then there's a saying we use when we can't understand something: **"That's as clear as mud!"** Yeh, **mud** is thick and hard to see through. Ask off-road drivers whose windshield wipers won't work on **muddy** windows – it's too thick. So, leave it to **God** to take **mud** and use it for **healing spiritual blindness!** Leave it to **God** to do the unexpected and place **mud** on our eyes **in order for us to see clearly!** But remember, sometimes when God places the **mud of healing** upon our eyes, he leaves a time in-between the *spitting* and the *washing* to help us grow.

4) COULDN'T SEE! I'll never forget the time I came home and told Charlotte **"I want to be a pastor."** I kept trying to pick her jaw up from the ground, but it kept falling back down. And while I was ready to go on the spot, Charlotte's state of **shock** was so intense, I realized that it was going to take some time to let her catch up with the idea. Going back to college for **4 more years**, this time with **2** little girls, well, she **couldn't see** how we might meet the challenges ahead. She kept stepping on my **rose colored glasses** every time she asked a realistic question like, **"Even if I find a job in Minnesota, how are we going to make enough money to survive on my salary alone? Who will take care of the girls during the day? We just spent all this time and money fixing up this house, and you want to sell it during a recession? My family is here, when will we ever get to see them over the next four years? You've just gotten a great raise, and you want to give up this financial security to go off and be poor college kids again? And what if you graduate and we get sent to Timbuktu instead of back here to God's country?"** Her questions were good questions, ...fair questions. But *I didn't have any answers.* And while I believed God was **calling me** to go was in the "Pool of Minnesota", I **couldn't see** how we were ever going to get there. The **mud** was thick, and I **couldn't see** through it. I discovered myself being in the period between the "spitting" and the "washing."

5) MUD! It took a full year for Charlotte to come around, and miraculously, just before we left, the house finally sold. And so we headed across country in a old used Ford, praying it would get us there, eager to settle into our new apartment on campus. After several days of driving, with worn out girls, and nervous anticipation, we parked in front of the seminary, and went to find the housing department. It was my jaw that hit the ground this time, when the lady behind the counter told me we were number **24** on the waiting list! **"What does that mean?"** I asked. **"Exactly what I said,"** the lady replied, **"there are 23 other families that have priority before you. But don't worry about it, you guys go get some lunch and come**

back this afternoon and we'll talk again!" Realizing that strangling a seminary employee was not going to be a good way to start off my seminary career, I bottled all my anger, and we went back to the car! Charlotte broke out in tears. **Mud, mud, mud...** it's all I could see – **thick, caked on mud.**

6) MUD WASHING TIME! “Charlotte,” I tried to calmly tell my wife, “**These are not the only apartments in town. There are bound to be some close by to the campus – we’re going to have to take this dilemma into our own hands.**” As we searched the papers and rental agencies, I angrily told God off, quite discouraged! “**I can’t believe you made me give up a great salary, sell, my home, move away from family and security, and bring us to a place where there is not the basics of life, like a simple apartment, for my tired family!**” But there were no apartments to be found in our price range. Late in the afternoon, it occurred to me that maybe there were some seminary apartments whose renters were on vacation and they wouldn’t mind **subletting** for a week or two! I had to get my children under cover! So I drug my tired hind-end back to the housing department to plead with the woman I had early want to kill. As I walked in, she nonchalantly asked, “**So are you ready to move in?**” “**I thought you told us we were 24th on the list?**” “*That’s right,*” she answered, “**so I made 23 other calls to see if the others were ready to move in today. They weren’t. So the one open apartment is yours. Didn’t I tell you just to relax, and come back later today?**” I didn’t know whether to hug her or send her to heaven early. But seeing the **relief** on my family’s faces, saved me from any rash statements or actions. As she handed us the keys, the **time of mud washing** occurred, and we began in hindsight to see clearly now how God had planned to perform the miracle of caring for us! The period between the **anointing of mud**, and the **washing** in the pool was over. It was **mud washing time!** Our vision was now clear!

7) DO SOMETHING! I look out at you today and I see **a whole lot of mud on a whole lot of eyes.** Whether you asked for it in prayer or not – God has come to you and **anointed you** with the very thing you need at this time in your life as you “**grow in His grace.**” The answer’s already **been given** to you – every healing process or blessing needed has been **activated** – you just don’t know what that is yet! Because **before** you will see clearly, Jesus asks you to **do something** – **follow** his directions to the Pool of Siloam in your life and **wash in it.** Imagine, even though you are still “spiritually blind” – never-the-less, the **prayer has been answered.** In the mean time we need to “**do something**”: *listen for* and *hear* his instructions and *follow* them, no matter how silly it sounds.

8) **SILLY!** Imagine the blind man *stumbling* down the crowded streets, *falling* in pot holes and *bumping* into things. Talk about **discouraging**. He could have said, “What am I doing? This is **silly!** Some man comes along and puts mud on my eyes, and I foolishly obey? I’ve been blind from birth! Nothing is going to change that! Listen to the heckling from some those who see me with mud on my eyes! I can’t take it! This is stupid and **silly** – I quit.” And he might at that time have *wiped the anointing away* – headed home – having **no idea** what gift Jesus had given him. This challenging test was... well, it was deemed **silly!**

9) **MUD IN YOUR EYES!** Right now, some of you have been **praying** feverishly for your children, young and old, who are **struggling** – but their pain and suffering *doesn’t seem to be going away*. Or you’re **praying** for a friend because of their **cancer**, or **stroke**, or **heart attack**... and *nothing seem to be happening*. Some of you are **struggling** in your marriages, and if there’s an answer coming - *you don’t see it*. Some of you **hate** your jobs but **feel trapped** and there’s *no answer in sight*. You’re **tired**, **discouraged**, and **loosing hope**. Some of you are **concerned** about the future of this **amazing congregation**, ...and if *God knows* what tomorrow will bring, He *hasn’t disclosed it* at this time. But could it be... that you are simply **in-between** the time of “**spitting**” and “**washing**”? Could it be you have **mud in your eyes?** **God’s anointing mud?**

10) **TRUSTING/LISTENING/OBEYING!** Friends, your prayers **HAVE** been heard – and **ARE** being answered. But the **healing mud** in your eyes has been put there for a reason. It is time for **trusting in God**. It is the time for **listening to and obeying God** – for **following** his directions as absurd as they appear to be. “**But Lord, I don’t see any light at the end of the tunnel!**” And yet he insists, “**Keep walking, keep moving in the direction I suggest, keep picking your feet up one step at a time, and don’t stop. Lean on me. Trust me. The pool is up ahead and we’ll wash your eyes, and then, at the time of my choosing you’ll see clearly what I’ve been doing. And you will be amazed.**” Are you **trusting in, listening to, and obeying** God?

11) **HOW!** How many of us can’t figure out **how** or **when** God is going to provide us with **employment**. You don’t know **how** your **broken relationship** with a family member is ever going to get repaired. You don’t know **how** God can bring new direction to a **struggling congregation**. You don’t know **how** God could ever help you **forgive** the person who abused you. You don’t know **how** you will ever get out of the **financial mess or debt** you are in. And as if that isn’t **enough stress** in your life, God puts **mud in your eyes!** “**Trust me**”, he says. “**Follow me – follow the sound of my voice. Ahead there is a pool of hope, a pool of “aha ha’s”, a pool that consists of a time and place when faith washes away the confusion and it**

all makes sense. And then, you will see the miracle of the spit and mud. After faithfully washing, you will see 'how'!"

12) I QUIT! Problem is, when confusion and discouragement *kicks in*, we want to **quit**. When the pain and suffering of *spiritual blindness*, of bumping into obstacles and tripping in potholes, gets to be *too much* ...we want to **quit**. "God's not going to come through," we scream! "Forget it. I **quit**!" And so we **do quit** – we **quit** our marriages, our relationships, we **quit** our work, and our committees, our church, and we just **walk away**. We wipe the anointing from our eyes and we **quit**.

13) BLAME GAME: WHO SINNED? And *after* wiping the anointing from our eyes, we begin to play the "**blame game!**" Like the disciples, we are convinced that *all our pain* is **someone else's fault**. ("**Who sinned**" they asked "that this man is blind?") Folks, yes, there are times when our pain is due to someone else's sin, but **most of the time** ...it is not. Sometimes *bad things* just happen in a *broken world*. Even to good people! But since we are suffering we *subconsciously* need to **take our frustration out** on someone else. And we play the **blame game!** It's my boss's fault. It's the pastor's fault! It's the youth director's fault! It's the neighbor's fault. The kid in my class's fault! It's the government's fault! It's God's fault! Rather than seeing our struggles as **an opportunity for us to grow** personally, we want to know "**Who sinned!**" "Who can I get angry at!" "Who can I project all my pent up frustration at?!" "Who can I blame for my confusion and tiredness!" And when we play the **blame game**, we sadly wipe the anointing from our eyes, and the chance to grow in His grace.

14) SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS! "**But Pastor, I'm so tired. I don't have the energy to keep going. I don't see the light at the end of the tunnel, and I'm angry and frustrated because I pray and nothing is happening.**" Friends, every one of us, here in this room, is dealing with *some form* of "**spiritual blindness**." Not being God, there's some part of your life that you don't understand. If God is blessing you or answering prayer, it's about as **clear as mud!** But there's where the good news comes in: Just because you can't see where you're going, just because you can't predict the future, just because nothing appears to be happening does **NOT** mean God has turned his back on you. The prayers **WERE** heard, the answers **WERE** given, the healing mud **HAS** been applied. The "cure", the big "ah ha", the relief, the answer – it's coming. In **God's time**, and in **God's way**. You are simply in the time frame **of spiritual blindness** between the anointing "**spit**" and the miracle of *seeing* clearly that comes with an obedient "**washing**" in your future.

15) CHRISTMASS = SPIT, EASTER = WASHING! You see, *Lent* is a season *between* the spit and the washing. We are *between* the gift given at Christmas and the “ah, ha” of Easter morning. Meanwhile the disciples, still in their spiritual blindness, ask “**If God is sending us a Savior, how can He come as a servant rather than a mighty King? And what possible good can come from this man’s imprisonment, judgment, and crucifixion? We don’t get it! And how can His spilt blood redeem the world?**” Ah, the *questions* they asked between the spit and the washing when they could not see clearly. The Christmas gift had been given, but they would have to reach the “**Easter Pool of Christ’s death and resurrection**” before they began to see clearly the *unconditional love and grace* of God.

16) CHRIST! Christ comes to you this morning to assure all who cannot see the future clearly. He wants you to know; God has heard your cry, and has applied the mud of healing! The “washing” may not come in your time frame, or according to your expectations, or even in this life-time. But it will come. The spit and healing mud *has* been applied! So, let us find a quiet place each day to *hear His directions* to the pool. Christ calls us to *depend* upon His Spirit to lead us. He empowers us to *tap* into His strength and patience. Let us open ourselves to the gift of faith that keeps us *trusting* and obediently *following* Him. Christ’s wish is that your *Spiritual Blindness* be *temporary* and that in “*the time of waiting*” you are brought *closer* to Him. Friends the Lord has already spit, and Christ will wash away the mud! Until then, *remain embraced* in His love and grace, *follow* Him, assured that someday, *you will see clearly* because of the gift of faith. **Praise God AMEN**

Sermon/Confessional Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, we confess that we are spiritually blind in so many areas of our life. We can not make sense of this broken world, our sinful nature, or the mystery of your ways. We confess we get easily discouraged, and we doubt, and we worry, and do everything but trust in you. Forgive us for not thinking you heard our prayers, or wondering if you care. Forgive us for demanding your answers to meet our expectations. Forgive us when we do not pray, “Thy will be done,” and mean it. Help us trust that you are answering our prayers, healing us, and helping us to grow. Empower us to wait patiently until the mud is washed from our eyes.

Lord, as we wait in-between the time of anointing and the time of seeing clearly, help us to find a quiet time and place to hear your Words. Forgive us when we busy our lives to the point that we wear ourselves out. Help us to seek you out, hear you, and follow your voice until we reach our own Pool of Siloam. Lord, forgive us when we think we can there on our own. And bestow upon us the gift of faith that we cannot create on our own. Help us surrender ourselves to you in love and trust, and help us to place everything we have and everything we are into your hands, knowing that you will never let us down.

And now Lord, although you know us better than we know ourselves, listen as we share in a moment of silence, those other parts of our lives that need to be forgiven, washed clean, healed, and made anew.

(Silence)

Lord, as you walked this earth you trusted in the Father and followed His wishes even to the cross. Help us to faithfully trust in his will, and follow in your steps. Help us to patiently wait upon His miracles and teach us how to grow in your Grace. In Jesus Name we pray, AMEN

Assurance of Forgiveness:

Friends, listen to the good news: The Lord whose power heals our spiritual blindness, has mercifully heard your confession and eagerly forgives you all your sins. May assurance, confidence and patience be yours until his blessings are seen clearly. Amen

Opening prayer: Lent 4, John 9:1-42,

Dear Heavenly Father, as we come before you this morning the world is glowing with your blessings and miracles. But many of us have not been able to see them. Some of us are trapped by a busy lifestyle and have not made time to see or count our blessings. Some of us are emotionally or spiritually wounded and are absorbed in our pain and suffering. Some of us are dealing with physical ailments and have turned inward. Our struggles with stressful relationships, earning a living, seeking work, raising children, and dealing with grief have caused us to miss the breaking in of your love upon our lives. Help this morning to open our hearts to the fact that you are all around us, and in us, healing, teaching, and guiding us in ways too awesome to explain. Help us come out of our fog and in the quietness of this place see what wonderful things you are doing all around us, and to us. Replace our fears and anxieties with the comfort that your gift of faith brings to our hearts. Remind us we are never alone, and that even before we ask, you send your love to us through your Son. Thank you Lord, for this precious time to worship you and receive your blessings. In Jesus Name we Pray! AMEN

OLD TESTAMENT: I Samuel 16:1-13

Well, in our OT lesson today we see the Lord working through the prophet Samuel to pick the next King of Israel who will replace Saul. As the candidates file by, Samuel is convinced by looking at outside appearances that he knows which God will choose. But God's ways are not our ways. God looks inside the heart. As we read the lesson let us reflect upon the times when we were absolutely convinced we knew God's will, only to be surprised. And yet, just as God chose David to be king, are not all of his decisions the right ones?

THE GOSPEL READING

JOHN 9:1-42

As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing 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 he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."
