

John 9:35-41

9:35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

9:36 He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."

9:37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he."

9:38 He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

9:39 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."

9:40 Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?"

9:41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Sermon: Two Dimes and a Nickel

They say that in 1974, David Thompson could jump so high and levitate for so long, that if you put a quarter on the top of the backboard in Reynolds Coliseum, he could jump up and give you change – two dimes and a nickel. More than a half century later, people still ask, "How do you know such things?" And red-clad State fans will tell them, "I didn't

believe it, but then I saw it with my own two eyes. I can't explain how or why, but oh man, do I believe!"

They say that in 1974, Philippe Petit used a tight-rope to high-wire between the World Trade Center Towers eight times. He balanced himself more than 1,300 feet in the air for forty-five minutes. And when I heard this story, I said: "Impossible! No way!" But you can see for yourself, with your own two eyes. Google it. And the YouTube video is posted well before AI. You'll see, and you'll believe. There was another miracle, too. Trespassing charges against Petit were dropped in exchange for him doing a performance for children in Central Park!!!

To be sure, Philippe Petit and David Thompson worked miracles – their bodies could do things that normal human beings can't. Certainly, each man possessed a discipline to bring out the very best of his natural abilities. But there's also no denying that each man was infused with God-given talent. And no amount of science, nor reason, nor logic will ever explain how certain human beings can possess super-natural amounts of athleticism, or balance, or genius.

What I love about the stories of these two men is that their audiences embraced the wonder of their talents. They allowed themselves to be swept up in the moment. Nobody looked for hidden wires. Nobody lobbed allegations of steroid use. Nobody said, "There's got to be a reasonable explanation for such talent." There was presence. Audiences realized immediately that something special was happening. And they believed. And in such belief, they were transformed into another plane, even if only briefly. In one fleeting moment, they felt electricity. And they didn't need an answer, or an explanation, or a dose of reality.

In today's pericope, there's another miracle. And it's of a physical, unexplainable nature. Jesus restores eye sight. He grabs some dirt, spits in his hands, makes the dirt mud, rubs it on a blind man's eyes, tells him to wash in the Pool of Siloam, and presto, the blind man can see.

Those who witnessed our more modern miracles, reacted with the following statement: "Look what he just did!" And they allowed that excitement to infuse them with energy.

Those who are witnesses to the blind man's healing do not react with a statement of excitement. Instead, they react with questions:

"How did he do that?"

"Why did he do that?"

"Should he have done that?"

"And should he have done that for you?"

Nobody celebrates the fact that here is a man whose life has been made more whole. Here is a man who will no longer be burdened by the stigma of blindness (regrettably, blindness is associated with sinfulness in the time of Jesus). Here is a man who is invited back into community, into the abundance of life.

But the village – its leaders, its residents, even the man's parents – demand an explanation. There's got to be an orderly reason for this. And we've got to authenticate the authority of this healer. And we've got to document what's really happened. After all, these kinds of things disturb the status quo in our quaint little town.

So...there's a series of investigations. The man is questioned, the synagogue's leaders are consulted, the man's parents are interviewed,

and the man is re-interviewed (actually re-interrogated!!!) a second time. “Who is this man who has healed you, and why has he done it?!? Answer us. Now!”

Eventually, the newly seeing man is exhausted and exasperated.

You say you don’t know Jesus. And you don’t know where he comes from. And you don’t know why he does what he does. Well, here’s what I know: I’m the one he helped. He gave me sight. And now I can see with my own two eyes. And it doesn’t take a genius to know that what this man has offered me is from God. And as a matter of fact, I believe this man is of God as well. A prophet, even.”

Would that this man’s story was the exception to the rule. It’s not. Whether we’re in ancient Palestine or modern day-Morrisville, the reporting of God’s miracles will always be met with skepticism. Sometimes, it seems, skepticism is less scary than belief. Sometimes it’s easier to dismiss the new challenges of God’s impossibilities, and instead, cling to the comfort of humanity’s known quantities. After all, if Jesus can help blind men see, and Samaritan women find living water, and Nicodemus see a little light in the dark of night, that means God’s got the power to transform our lives as well. That means that God may meet us in transcendent moments, and radically reshape our foundations. We might have to explain the unexplainable.

The blind man refuses to let his neighbors’ need for answers and explanations impair his belief. He trusts what he experiences. He allows his new sight to lead him to the living Word. He cannot explain it. But he knows what he sees. He grasps the Spirit. He grasps truth. He sees and believes.

Here's the challenge today's passage provides for each of us. If we hang around Millbrook long enough, something's gonna grab ahold of us. We might not be able to explain it. "How can this place, these people, this community make us feel what we feel? How can what's so broken become so healed? How can our community notice the parts of us that we thought were invisible? How is it that our bread isn't just bread, and our grape juice isn't just grape juice?"

That's the challenge, and here's the question it poses. When basketball players levitate, and acrobats tight-rope tall buildings, and blind persons find sight, and God somehow stirs inside each of us, will our belief extend only as far as our neighbor's skepticism? Or will we embrace the unexplainable, and believe what we have seen for ourselves? And in a single moment, will we let God transcend our need to be right, our need to know everything, our need to say, "We told you so."

I don't know about you, but I want to see God make change. Miraculous change. Transformative change. Change that's so good, it's too good to be true. Change we can barely believe.

Two dimes and a nickel to be exact. Amen. (And Go Pack!).