

Date: March 15, 2026 (Fourth Sunday in Lent)

1. Texts: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Ps. 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: invitation and acceptance.
4. Aim: explore, challenge.
5. Proposition: "In response to Jesus' invitation, we now know God and have become his channels."

GOD'S TREATMENT FOR OUR BLINDNESS

We all know that the story of the man born blind is not about physical healings. Jesus' actions here are not a prescription for a new medical treatment we should follow. Making mud out of spit is not a healing procedure for congenital blindness. In fact, you really can't use this story as a basis for praying to God to heal blind people. This story is not about physical healing. This story is about spiritual healing.

The ever-present song, "Amazing Grace", knew this truth:

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind but now I see.

The gospel story and this mega-hit are not about physical healing. They are about our spiritual healing that enables us to see God.

Let's start with the absolute certainty that we are all born blind — spiritually blind. That's the impact of original sin and all the other stuff related to being stuck inside time, space and human experience. People don't automatically know God. We don't instinctively follow God's will. Heck, we don't instinctively know God's will. We are born outside of a relationship with God. We are blind.

Just as Jesus took the initiative with the blind man, God has to intervene. God has to introduce himself to us. In essence, God has to say, "Here I am! Come, follow me in faith and love." It is left up to us to say, "Here I am! Send me."

Almost always God uses people to introduce himself. It's usually our families and our home congregations. These people become the hands, feet and voice of God. These people become the channel through which God pours his self-revelation.

Of course, there can be problems with this.

Sometimes, the people delivering God's introduction don't quite get the message right. Some people will present God as an angry, demanding father. Well, who wants maybe a second one of those?

Then, others will portray God as a vague, quite indistinct spirit who wanders around in a daze not doing much of anything other than loving people in a 1960s, hippy sort of way. Who can follow a vague love wandering around?

Then still others represent a God who throws miracles around like confetti, but only for those who are good enough.

There are problems when you rely on human messengers.

Then, there are problems with those of us receiving the message. Maybe we already think of God as judgmental, because the Church is judgmental. Maybe we demand independence because we want to prove ourselves to be strong enough not to need a god. Or maybe we don't want to give up whatever we think we should in order to follow God.

There can be problems with the message sent and the message received.

Well, we can't do anything about how the other person receives the message. That's totally their responsibility.

We can only work on our means of sharing the invitation to know and follow God.

So, first: God is a being, a person, whom we can choose to know and love. This God is not calling us to obey a set of rules. Rather, he is calling us into a loving and supportive relationship with him. He loves us with all that he is, and his introduction calls us to love him in the same way.

Second: we have to work on introducing God in the way that the listener needs to have him introduced. We never say, "Here's how you have to believe in God." Each person has his or her own relationship with God. So, introduce God

as a spiritual partner that the listener has to come to know and love on their own terms.

Third: we have to provide a family of supporters as the individual works on his or her love for God. That's what the Church is all about. The Church doesn't exist to tell people how to love God. The Church exists to support people as they develop their relationship with God—you know, moving from courtship to engagement to marriage. Maybe it's not so wrong to think of the Church as a matchmaker between believers and God.

Matchmaker, Matchmaker,
 Make me a match,
 Find me a find,
 Catch me a catch
 Matchmaker, Matchmaker
 Look through your book,
 And make me a perfect match.¹

The matchmaker Church looks through its scripture book to make the best match between an individual and God.

We are born spiritually blind. God introduces himself to us through other people, mostly our families and our congregations. We make the decision to see him as he is. Then we become one of his matchmakers. Put like that, it all seems, well, obvious, even simple.

If it's all so obvious and simple, why isn't this happening in our congregations?

Well, we've lost sight of the need to invite others to know God. We've also learned to leave such invitations up to clergy. Then, society has taken to shaming those whose belief is attached to the Christian Church. Lastly, we're afraid of being rejected by those who reject our invitation.

I'm not sure we can get reverse these trends, but we have to at least make a start.

¹ "Matchmaker, Matchmaker", *Fiddler on the Roof*, Sheldon M Harnick, 1964.

From Jesus onwards, the Christian faith has always been an evangelizing faith. Jesus said, “Come, follow me” to Andrew, Simon, James and John as well as the other apostles. He said the same to the seventy-two who walked ahead of him. He extended an invitation to Matthew, the tax collector and Zacchaeus. Paul went to the lands of the Gentiles to extend the invitation. Philip and Thomas went to India. On and on the history goes—Christianity is spread not by osmosis and certainly not by cultural colonization. Christianity is spread by those people who know Jesus and seek to introduce him to others. This is how it has always been.

The Anglican Church in Canada has lost sight of this. We actually think the faith is spread by sprinkling babies with water as they are dangled over a makeshift bathtub on Sunday mornings. Christians are made, not born. It is up to current believers to begin the process of including others in the faith.

Having experienced the saving love of God, we supernaturally want to share that love with others. The need to introduce God to people is inherent in the life of faith.

This need belongs to every believer, not just to clergy. Clergy serve a defined and very limited function in the Church. The drive to share the love of God belongs to every believer—especially if we claim to love other people. It is out of love for God and love for others that we share the invitation to know God.

The real question is how. How are we to invite others to know God?

First, we avoid the use of the word “should”, as if we could compel someone else to believe.

Second, we start with our own experience of God. We rely on our experience of God’s love, compassion and forgiveness. We rely on our own experience of the faith through the Church. This means that our statements about Jesus and the faith should begin with the pronoun, “I”. “I find... I think... I’m certain that...” I recognize that this is risky. But we cannot share what we do not possess, especially when it comes to the saving faith in Christ.

Lastly, we look for opportunities to share the faith. When someone mentions the cancer that is threatening a common acquaintance, look for the chance to say, "I have found some peace and security in praying in specific ways."

When another complains about the state of the world, look for ways to introduce Christian thought into the discussion. "Our actions and choices will actually reveal our faith. Like the old camp song says, 'They'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love.'"

Then, be ready to answer questions when someone asks. St. Peter advised us in this:

Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.²

Without being condescending or derogatory, we answer every question to the best of our ability.

That's how we cope with the spiritual blindness of the world. We become part of God's treatment for our universal condition.

That's what the healing of the blind beggar has to teach us. It's not about physical healing. It's not about praying for physical healing. The story is about spiritual blindness such as demonstrated by the Jewish leadership. The story contains God's challenge to us to become part of his treatment for the world.

AMEN.

² 1 Peter 3:15-16.