

## Message: "Revelation's Awkward Dance"

### Scripture Lesson: John 9:1-41

<sup>1</sup>As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." <sup>6</sup>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, <sup>7</sup>saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

<sup>8</sup>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?" <sup>9</sup>Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." <sup>10</sup>But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" <sup>11</sup>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." <sup>12</sup>They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

<sup>13</sup>They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup>Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup>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." <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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." <sup>18</sup>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 <sup>19</sup>and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" <sup>20</sup>His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; <sup>21</sup>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." <sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." <sup>24</sup>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." <sup>25</sup>He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." <sup>26</sup>They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" <sup>27</sup>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?" <sup>28</sup>Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. <sup>29</sup>We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." <sup>30</sup>The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. <sup>31</sup>We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. <sup>32</sup>Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born

blind. <sup>33</sup>If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." <sup>34</sup>They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. <sup>35</sup>Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" <sup>36</sup>He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." <sup>37</sup>Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." <sup>38</sup>He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. <sup>39</sup>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." <sup>40</sup>Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" <sup>41</sup>Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Today, I start off with a sad story. It is the story of my own personal experience dealing with a traumatized, troubled, temperamental, and generally sick motorcycle. It was a 1970 model Suzuki TS185. This was a bike I bought when I was about 14 years old, and, being in the typical economic bracket of a 14 year old in the 1970's, you can probably guess about its condition as a used bike - it was a very, very used bike, full of dents and dings, barely running - you know, a 14 year old's dream bike? At least for me it was, for I loved tinkering with motorcycles more than riding them - and this bike involved much more tinkering than riding.

In any event, after I had worked on and ridden that bike for a couple of years, I became unsatisfied with its mechanical deficiencies - in other words, it ran worse and worse, barely starting and putting out almost no power at all. So I made the decision to go ahead and test my mechanical prowess - I decided to completely rebuild the engine. I took that thing apart piece by piece, until I no longer had an engine but a bunch of pieces scattered all over the garage floor. I had organized those pieces somewhat, so I wasn't worried; I cleaned and degreased and lubricated and checked all those pieces before I began the reconstruction.

It went very well; things were progressing nicely, and before you knew it, that engine was back together looking sharp! After the last bolt was tightened, I filled the tank with gas and made sure the oil was full, and gave it a kick - oh, it sounded, well, heavenly! I took that smooth purring motorcycle for a test drive up and down the street - it was like I had a new bike, it ran so well. Proud of myself for the work I had done, I parked the bike back in the garage and began to clean up from the work I had performed - only to discover that I had left out a pretty good handful of nuts, bolts, metal items, and springs from my reconstruction of

the engine. I had absolutely no idea where they came from, except that they had originally been in the motorcycle I had just disassembled and put back together.

As I sat there with that handful of parts, I realized I had three choices: I could give up and sell the bike for parts, of which I had extra; or, I could tear apart that motorcycle again, and see what went where so that the machine was completely restored to its original condition, all parts accounted for; or I could enjoy riding the bike as it was, somewhat uncertain as to what might happen.

Guess what I chose to do? I rode that bike all over the mountains of Colorado. I rode it carefully, mind you, but rode it nonetheless, up in the mountains where speed was never the point; seeing the sights, following the trail, seeking out beauty - that was the point, at least for me. And I spent many years after that repair riding that motorcycle which never self-destructed. It is true that, after that day, that motorcycle was my prayer motorcycle, for every time I drove that bike I was praying the whole time that it wouldn't explode or fly apart due to the removal of some critical part I failed to re-install. Every ride was like - well, a miracle.

It is perhaps a stretch to describe my experience with that bike as a miracle, but a similar pattern evolved with that bike that happens often, I believe, in our life experiences on this planet when the unexplained or undeserved occurrences benefit our way. There are things we can't explain, occurrences we can't comprehend, benevolences that we did nothing to deserve, graces that are given to us without us meriting such attention. We have three choices, whenever such a miracle intersects with our lives - we can refuse to receive it into our lives for the reason that we can't justify or understand or control how it came to be; we can dive deeply into the efforts to understand how on earth the goodness came to be, employing our reasoning faculties and engaging in deep research to trace its origins and pathways into our lives; or we can simply accept that sometimes, miracles are given to us, God knows why - and that they are meant to bless us, just as they are.

I believe this is one of the strongest messages of our passage of scripture today, where a blind man is given sight by Jesus. The miracle itself takes two verses; arguing about it takes the other 39 verses. Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Is this really the man we knew who once was blind, or an imposter meant to fool us? Is it a sin to heal on the sabbath? What do his parents say? Can a sinner perform a miracle? Is it not only God that can produce such an act? But what of our own volition; can we merit favor apart from

our standing in society? What does it mean to proclaim that one comes to give sight to the blind, but to make those who claim to see blind to the world? Can one induce miracles from God by obeying the law or doing good works or belonging to the right group or by living a virtuous life? Or is there much more to it all?

Sometimes miracles are messy; they happen in unexpected ways to unexpected people; miracles sometimes involve spitting in the dirt, mixing a vile mud, and smearing the concoction on shuttered eyes; miracles sometimes destabilize us and catch us off guard, such as a terminal cancer disappearing, or a generous act timed perfectly to meet our desperate need. Miracles are often questionable, such as seeing the face of Jesus in a plate of spaghetti or witnessing apparitions that defy explanation. Whatever form they take, miracles usually give rise to as much consternation as they generate excitement; they are so very often the subject of arguments and disagreements over what they mean, why they occur, and even if they are real.

But not all miracles involve physical anomalies or obvious occurrences. Perhaps this is the main point of the scripture story, the greater miracle being so subtle that it is missed by the Jewish authorities as well as the man's parents and his neighbors and even the disciples themselves. The man put it bluntly, when cross-examined from the left and the right: From the passage, referring to the Jewish leaders dealing with the healed man -- "<sup>24</sup>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.'" <sup>25</sup>He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." "All I know is that I was blind, but now I see" - his experience, what he did know, confirmed that God was at work. He asked for no further explanation, he needed no deeper understanding than that; he accepted the blessing, and attributed it to the God embodied in Jesus.

Maybe this is our take-away from this account - a model of the kind of faith that doesn't need to understand all that God does and why? Maybe this is enough for the miraculous to be experienced -- our willingness to believe that God is at work, in our lives and in our world? The culmination of the miracle, when the healed man was cast out of the synagogue and found himself with Jesus once more, found an interaction that highlights the importance of one's willingness to believe. "<sup>35</sup>Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'" <sup>36</sup>He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell

me, so that I may believe in him." <sup>37</sup>Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." <sup>38</sup>He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him."

Perhaps miracles depend upon us being open to the possibilities that God may do something we cannot understand or make sense of that blesses us beyond what we know we deserve or could come up with ourselves? Perhaps it was the man's simple acceptance of the gift of grace that was the greater miracle here, even as those around him struggled mightily to accept what was before their very eyes?

A faith that demands of God an explanation for God's activities is less a faith than an inquisition, a sort of putting God to the test before one's allegiance is given. In contrast, a faith that anticipates the goodness of God being shared in ways that cannot be controlled or measured is a gateway to the miraculous. It is clear what benefits us most - being open to receive what God offers, even as it exceeds our comprehension - especially if it exceeds our comprehension. This is where miracles abound.