

Biblical Background

JOHN 9:1-41

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: The man born blind was placed at the entrance to the Temple Mount each day by his family. He is a person to whom you would give alms. He was alms worthy because of his blindness. He would have been a familiar figure on the southern steps leading into the Temple Mount because thousands of pilgrims would pass through this entrance daily. They were coming to the Temple to pray and to make offerings. It was a blessing to have persons like the blind man to give alms to along the way. God is pleased with this sort of exchange.

TERMS: Sabbath Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath even though his condition was not life threatening. You could save a life on the Sabbath but anything more than that was considered work. This man was blind and had been blind since his birth. He could be healed on any other day. Why did Jesus have to desecrate the Sabbath by healing him in the holy day? The Sabbath lasted from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday evening. This healing took place on Saturday morning when thousands of worshipers were on their way to the Temple.

Temple visits A visit to the temple would begin with being ritually bathed in the Pool of Siloam before entering the Temple area. Many would have seen this man, with a paste of mud over his eyes, rushing past them to wash in the public pool in the southern City of David.

The Prophet Since the time of Moses, for over 1500 years, the Jewish faith community has been waiting for a new Moses to arrive on the scene. Moses promised that one day another Prophet like himself would arise to lead Israel. The Jews have been waiting for this new Moses. Our formally blind man wonders if Jesus might be the Prophet, the new Moses, who would lead Israel. Moses was a Prophet who was powerful in word and deed. He spoke and he performed miracles among the people. Jesus is doing the same, and the healed man reminds the religious leaders that to his knowledge no one had ever restored the sight of a man born blind. Therefore, the religious leaders challenge the parents of the man to prove that he was born blind. This miracle amazes them all.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: In the longer version of this Gospel story the account begins with a question that the disciples ask Jesus. "Who sinned? This man or his parents that he was born blind?" They know this man. He has been in this place soliciting alms for as long as they can remember. They wonder what the cause and effect of the sin equation is in this situation. Jesus responds by saying that neither he nor his parents sinned. That is not why he is blind and has been since his birth. Rather, sometimes people are just born blind. Jesus then uses this occasion to display the authority he has as a healer and restores sight to this man.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: The man does not ask to be healed. If asked he might have said no. He is an alms worthy recipient in his current condition. If his sight is restored how will he support himself and his family? Every Jew is obliged to pray, to fast, and to give alms. God is obliged to provide alms worthy persons for our generosity. This man performs a valuable religious service in the faith community. Jesus changes the course of his life and then finds him later to console him with the news that he has met, and has been healed by, the very Messiah of God. It has been a good day for him, his family, and the whole community. Yet it is the religious leaders who remain the blind that Jesus hopes to fully impact.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: How as a family might you be called to help the blind see? What ways do you think as a family you might experience blindness?

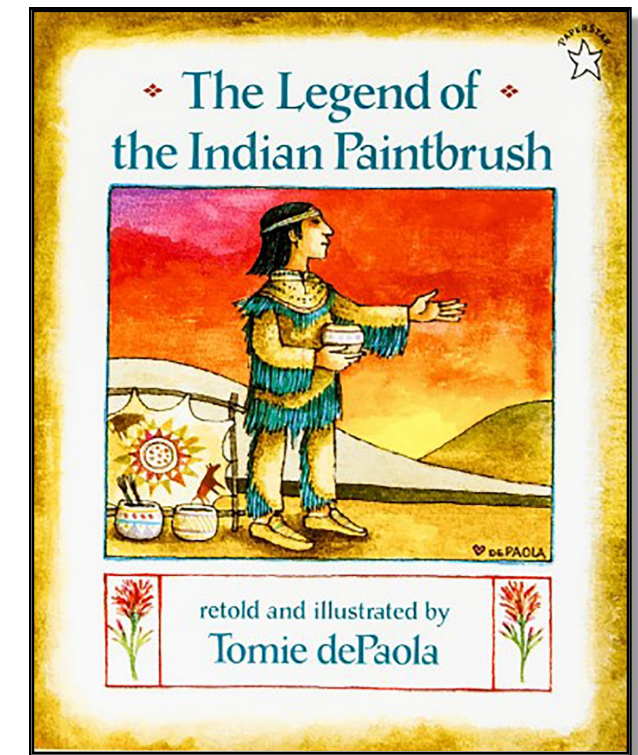
CHARACTER QUALITIES: SEEING THROUGH IMAGINATION
DARING TO BE DIFFERENT
SEE WHO YOU ARE

ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES: 1) Have a family paint-out. Go out to a park or your back yard and study nature. Bring paints and paper, take time to really see. What do you see that you might have missed when you study something God created to recreate it? Practice listening, what do you hear, what do you see? Share with each other what you learned from the experience. 2) Take time as a family to visit with a person who is blind. Learn from them all the things they "see" that others might miss.

Living Grace

Cycle A 4th Sunday
of Lent

"BORN FOR WORKS OF GOD"



*In spring, the hills and meadows of Texas and Wyoming are ablaze with the reds, oranges, and yellows of the Indian Paintbrush flower. In **The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush**, we learn of a young boy who had a dream-vision in which it was revealed that one day he would create a painting that was as pure as the colors of the evening sky at sunset. The boy grew up to become the painter of the tribe, and although he made paints from the brightest flowers and the reddest berries, he could not capture the beautiful, intense colors of the sunset.*

Finally one night, he heard a voice telling him that tomorrow would be the day he could paint the evening sky and that the paints would be provided for him. When he went to his special painting spot, he found brushes filled with paints sticking out of the ground (and in the illustration, looking quite a bit like flowers.) With those brushes, he painted a beautiful sunset painting. The next morning, the people awoke to find the countryside covered with color. The paint brushes had taken root and turned into yellow, red, and orange flowers. The people rejoiced when the flowers arrived each spring, and Little Gopher was then called He-Who-Brought-the-Sunset-to-the-Earth.



INTERIOR, CHURCH OF THE LIGHT
Architecture by Tadao Ando ~ 1999
Ibaraki Kasugaoka Church ~ Ibaraki, Japan

EXPLORING THE ART:

One of architect Tadao Ando's most famous designs is the Ibaraki Kasugaoka Church in Japan, which is known as the Church of the Light, because of the cross-shaped opening in the concrete wall behind the altar. The church is a small building, only about 1200 sq ft, made of thick concrete walls. The benches, along with the floor boards, are made of re-purposed scaffolding used in the construction.

One theme that Ando expresses in this work is the dual nature of existence. The space of the chapel is defined by light, the strong contrast between light and solid. In the chapel light enters from behind the altar from a cross cut in the concrete wall that extends vertically from floor to ceiling and horizontally from wall to wall, aligning perfectly with the joints in the concrete. At this intersection of light and solid the occupant is meant to become aware of the deep division between the spiritual and the secular within himself or herself.

Another feature of the interior is its profound emptiness. Many who enter the church say they find it disturbing. The distinct void space and absolute quiet amounts to a sense of serenity. For Ando the idea of 'emptiness' means something different. It is meant to transfer someone into the realm of the spiritual. The emptiness is meant to invade the occupant so there is room for the spiritual to fill them.

"In all my works, light is an important controlling factor," says Ando. "Light gives, with each moment, new form to being and new interrelationships to things, and architecture condenses light to its most concise being. The creation of space in architecture is simply the condensation and purification of the power of light."

Sunday Gospel

JOHN 9:1-41

As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth.
He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva,
and smeared the clay on his eyes,
and said to him,
"Go wash in the Pool of Siloam" — which means Sent —.
So he went and washed, and came back able to see.

His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said,
"Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?"
Some said, "It is,"
but others said, "No, he just looks like him."
He said, "I am."

They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees.
Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a sabbath.
So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see.
He said to them,
"He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see."

So some of the Pharisees said,
"This man is not from God,
because he does not keep the sabbath."
But others said,
"How can a sinful man do such signs?"
And there was a division among them.
So they said to the blind man again,
"What do you have to say about him,
since he opened your eyes?"
He said, "He is a prophet."

They answered and said to him,
"You were born totally in sin,
and are you trying to teach us?"
Then they threw him out.

When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out,
he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"
He answered and said,
"Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"
Jesus said to him,
"You have seen him, and
the one speaking with you is he."
He said,
"I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him.

Making the Connections

FOR PARENTS

WHEN ONE IS BORN TO LEAD, ONE MUST BE WILLING TO SEE NEW VISIONS AND TO DREAM NEW DREAMS!

Little Gopher and the man born blind both seem to have a common destiny - a unique and specific role that they were 'born to play' on God's behalf for their communities. The man born blind grows up as a person set apart, and so does Little Gopher. Little Gopher doesn't fit in with the activities that most young men participate in, we can be sure that the blind man felt the same way most of the time. The wise shaman in our children's story played an important role in the life of Little Gopher. A role of encouragement, "Your place among the people will be remembered for a different reason," he said.

Jesus played a huge role in helping the blind man to see his role. The question wasn't one of whether his blindness was a result of his or his parents sin. The question was, "What role would he fulfill?" Jesus said, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him." In order to fully understand the meaning of the messages and miracles in the Gospel, we must always ask "what does this mean for us?" Both young men in our stories today have their Vision Quest. The Shaman sends Little Gopher on a mission, and he goes willing and receptively to listen to the voice of God. Jesus sends the blind man to a public pool in the middle of everything with mud on his eyes. Imagine standing in the middle of the public plaza and a blind man with his eyes covered in mud makes his way to the pools.

What a teachable moment Jesus makes of this. Jesus has been sent to fulfill the work of the Pharisees and the religious leaders. But they can't see it, their eyes are "covered with mud". Only with humility and reliance upon God, which were the ways of the blind man Jesus points out, could one come to fully see the presence of the God within. It is God's desire Jesus teaches, to free all of us from the challenges we find ourselves in, of all that binds us. Jesus came to liberate us and through this story he illustrates for us today the paths that we must be on to discover the same liberation the blind man.

Both the blind man and Little Gopher were given sight through their leaps and journeys of faith. They were given inner sight. What a gift this is! Both were chosen by God, for God to demonstrate the works of God, through works that would teach others of Jesus and his way, his truth, and his life.

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: Do you ever feel like you have a gift or purpose in you that no one can see? How can you learn to trust it and believe in what is in you? How can sharing your insights make a lasting difference? What do you think it means to see with your heart? What are some things you see that you feel no one else can?

THE CHILDRENS' STORY: Do you think Little Gopher could see with his heart? What did Little Gopher see that no one else could? How were the works of God visible in Little Gopher?

THE GOSPEL STORY: How were the works of God made visible in the man born blind? Jesus shows in healing the blind man that God's gifts coming alive in a person makes their life limitless. What healing does both the blind man and Little Gopher experience? What does it do for them? What does it do for their communities? What could the Blind Man see that the religious leaders couldn't? What could the blind man see that no one else could?

Do we sometimes put people in a box and don't see what they must contribute? How is that limiting? Jesus shows in healing the blind man that God's gifts coming alive in a person makes their life limitless.