

*Just the Facts*

“Just the facts, Ma’am.” That’s what Detective Joe Friday used to say on the old TV show *Dragnet*. Someone would go into a longwinded description of a crime with lots of conjecture and speculation, and Ol’ Joe would pull them back to the basics by saying, “Just the facts, Ma’am.”

The facts of the case presented to us in John chapter nine are rather simple and straightforward. There was a man born blind. Jesus made mud, using dirt and saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. Jesus told the man to go wash in a certain pool, which he did. And the man was healed. Those are the facts. An incredible and challenging story, hard to believe, both now and then, but the facts are the facts. Any unbiased evaluation of the gospels has to admit that they are amazingly accurate historic documents, real factual material.

Have you ever heard anyone say, “My mind is made up, don’t confuse me with the facts?” People say that jokingly today but it often happens to be true. That also seems to be what of the Pharisees and bystanders, and even the formerly blind man’s own parents, seem to be saying in this story. The Bible is full comic theological irony, and the irony here is that the people with good physical sight cannot see the spiritual reality staring them right in the eye, while the formerly physically blind man can see the spiritual with 20/20 vision. Those who thought they had insight weren’t going to swayed from their preconceived notions by just the facts.

The blind man changed; he grew; he incorporated new knowledge and wisdom. He came to know Jesus as his healer, as the promised Son of Man, and as someone worthy of being followed. The Pharisees and the others were blind to this though. They had already made up their minds about Jesus. They were just certain that he was a sinner and that he was not sent from God.

You might say that the Pharisees were blinded by their prejudices, fears, and sheer stubbornness. Knowing what we know about Pharisees from the sermon two weeks ago, we might also say that their rejection of Jesus was due to their inability to see beyond what they had been taught about religion, politics, and social status. Peer pressure and professional pressures often try to force us to look at things in a certain way, and it's a rare person that can overcome those pressures and think, not for themselves, but think in God's way.

Your co-workers, your teachers, your families and friends, might be atheist or agnostic. They might think faith is silly and going to church is a waste of time. It's hard to be a Christian in a thoroughly secular environment that is hostile to Christianity. But you can stand up for your faith and be a witness to them. You can do it.

The man born blind courageously stuck to what he knew to be true. He would not be bullied or intimidated. He didn't fret, he didn't over analyze, and he didn't hide from his questioners. He just told them the facts. He told them what Jesus had done for him. And what Jesus had done was set him free. Free from a world without form or color; free from a life of begging to

survive; but most of all, free to know and worship Christ, and be his disciple. Jesus frees us in as similar way. How?

The washing in the pool of Siloam metaphorically represents Holy Baptism. From our sermon last week we know all about Holy Baptism: how it makes us God's child and cleanses us from sin. Just like the Pool of Siloam washed off the mud and healed the blind man, so does the water of Holy Baptism wash away the stain of original sin on us and make us holy before God. In that washing there is another biblical irony: Jesus used mud to clarify the man's sight. We wouldn't expect mud to help someone see -- quite the opposite.

But God often chooses the unexpected to accomplish his purposes in the world. Just like he chose David, the youngest and smallest of Jesse's son, to be Israel's greatest king. Just like he used a cross, an instrument of suffering and shame, to win our salvation. God does not look at things as we do. We are mistaken if we think the way we see is the way God sees.

In the physical world, light is necessary for human sight. In total darkness we cannot see, we are all blind. That is why we speak of Christ as "the Light of the World." Only when we know him, only when we apply his wisdom to the world, do we see clearly. The light of Christ is dawning on us now. We look for the glorious light of the world to come, when we leave this life and go to be with Christ. But we are also living in the light of Christ right now in this world. His Word guides our paths. His teaching instructs us what to do. We who have been justified by him are called to lead lives of

holiness and righteous as a witness to the world. We are called to bring the light of Christ to others and give them sight.

Jesus gives us a mission, a job to do, but he doesn't leave us alone. He is beside us, encouraging and empowering us. His Holy Spirit enables us. Through word and sacrament, through the community we call the church, in times of disappointment, like when our offerings got stolen, in times of great tragedy, like the aftermath of the Japanese earthquake, and in times of great joy, like when people are healed from illnesses, Christ is there for us, shedding his light upon us, leading us to deeper levels of faith and truth. And those are the facts. Amen.