Today, we’ll be talking a lot about seeing. The sense of sight is the most remarkable and valuable of our 5 senses. What is amazing is that in the act of seeing, so much goes on without our even having to think about it. The eye senses light, and the iris automatically opens and closes to let the right amount of light into the eye. That light coming from an object is focused by the lens onto the retina, which converts the light to an electrical signal. That signal is transmitted to the brain, which then interprets the signal, and even stores it for future reference. Remarkable and fascinating.

Sight is so important to us and so much a part of us that it has entered our language. “Don’t you see?”, meaning of course, “Don’t you understand?” “I saw the light”, as in our choir anthem. And of course, “Seeing is believing.” These phrases are not unique to English, but widespread in human language, including the biblical languages.

“Seeing is believing” is a particularly telling phrase. If we see something with our own eyes, we are much more likely to believe it than if someone else tells us about it, especially if the event is of a spectacular nature.

In our scripture, Jesus gives sight to a man who had been born blind. The fact that Jesus heals this man is significant on its face, of course. But there is much more going on here than just that. Jesus gets caught up in a controversy. The healing threatens some people. And they don’t like what Jesus has to say about it all.

**John 9:1-12 NIV**

**As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."**

As we begin our passage, Jesus and the disciples encounter a blind man. Echoing a common prejudice of the time, the disciples asked Jesus who had sinned such that this man was born blind. In their worldview, blindness was a curse that was a punishment to those who had done wrong. Those who showed righteous behavior, on the other hand, were rewarded with health and prosperity.

But Jesus attacks this misunderstanding. No one sinned here; instead, this man’s blindness has a special purpose – a work of God will be done in and through him. By way of explanation, Jesus offers some metaphors – figures of light. Jesus speaks of doing the work of God “as long as it is day” and warns that “Night is coming, when no one can work.” But he’s not talking about a normal, physical 24-hour day. We see that by the urgency with which he speaks. Why not just wait until tomorrow? Because in some sense, there is no tomorrow. Jesus says, “While I am in the world,” implying that there will be a time when he is not, “I am the light of the world.”

**6 After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 7 "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. 8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." 10 "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked. 11 He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." 12 "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.**

Unlike other occasions in the gospels where Jesus heals, here we do not have a request from the blind man for healing. This isn’t to say that he didn’t ask for a healing, but the emphasis is on Jesus’ proactivity. In any case, his response to meeting the blind man is a rather strange ritual. Jesus spits (Gk ptuo – onomatopoeia) onto the ground, makes mud (Gk. “clay”) from the mixture and applies it to the blind man’s eyes. Then, Jesus tells the man to go wash himself in the pool of Siloam. The man does so, and he sees. We are reminded of an OT healing when the prophet Elisha has the Syrian General Naaman wash 7 times in the Jordan River to heal his leprosy.

In today’s scripture, the blind man’s healing is met with skepticism. “Isn’t he the fellow who used to sit and beg?” “No, it only looks like him.” After all, everyone knows you don’t just get healed from blindness. But the man’s testimony is insistent – he was blind and now he sees, thanks to this man named Jesus.

In vs. 13-23, the Pharisees get into the act. They interrogate the man, doubting his story, and they criticize Jesus for working on the Sabbath. Not satisfied by the blind man’s answers, the Pharisees seek out his parents. The parents simply say that their son was born blind, he can now see, and they don’t know how. So, they say, why don’t you ask him? He is of age.

**John 9:24-41 NIV**

**A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." 25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" 26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" 28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."**

In gauging the Pharisees’ response to this healing, we do need to remember that this is not the first time Jesus has provoked controversy among them. Here in John’s gospel, Jesus starts controversial teaching, cleanses the Temple, heals on the Sabbath, talks to a Samaritan woman (remember last week), and gets in a number of arguments before this healing of the blind man.

Still, the vehemence of the Pharisees’ response is surprising. Even with their browbeating him, though, they can’t make the man change his story. On their insistence that Jesus is a sinner, the (formerly) blind man says, “I don’t know about that; I just know that I was blind but now I see.” At the man’s suggestion that the Pharisees might want to be Jesus’ disciples, they become infuriated.

At the beginning of the 18th century, a man named Molyneux posed what was then a philosophical question, which was no doubt influenced by the fact that his wife was blind. It goes like this. A person who is born blind is given a sphere and a cube that weigh about the same and made of the same material and the person is asked to be able to identify them by touch. Then the person gains eyesight for the first time. Without touching the sphere or cube, will the newly sighted person be able to tell the difference between them using only his/her newly acquired sense of vision?

**30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.**

You have to like this now newly-sighted man, no longer blind. He has a lot of pluck. He is not at all intimidated by the Pharisees. As a matter of fact, he even returns their assertion about not knowing where Jesus is from (they even call him “this fellow”), with sarcasm. Our translation is pretty good, but in Greek, it’s even more sarcastic. “Now this is a wonderful thing” is another possible translation. But then we see another reason for their hostility. They tell the man he was steeped in sin at birth, and of course that was a reference to his being born blind. Jesus’ healing of the man upsets their idea of who is a sinner and who is not.

Molyneux’s question is today no longer a philosophical one. Dr. Pawaa Sinha, professor of vision and computational neuroscience at MIT has the answer. Dr. Sinha founded a group, the Prakash Project, that offers free eye surgery to poor people in India. Some of the patients that the group has had are children who were blinded at or soon after birth by cataracts. Removing the cataracts gives them the ability to see.

But what do they see? The patient sees a lot of swirling colors and forms, but is not immediately able to connect what the eyes are detecting with any particular object. With time, the newly sighted person can learn to determine the identity of objects by touching them and coordinating that with the new sense of vision. But they never really have “normal” vision. So the answer to Molyneux’s question is clear – there is no innate concept of “sphere” or “cube” planted in us – we have to learn it.

**35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." 40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" 41 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.**

Modern medicine can now sometimes restore sight, or even provide it for the first time. While we cannot heal all forms of blindness, we do appreciate that eyesight is not only dependent on the eyes, but the brain as well. To truly see requires something inside of us to help us understand the world in which we live.

The man knows that Jesus is special, but he doesn’t exactly know how. Jesus asks if he believes in the Son of Man. The man doesn’t know who he is, but he wants to. Jesus tells him, “You have now seen him.” The man has no doubts that this is true; he worships Jesus. For him, seeing is believing.

Jesus announces that the blind will see, which is a messianic prophesy, and he says those who see will become blind. The Pharisees are still hanging around, and they ask Jesus, “Are you saying we’re blind too?” Jesus says that if one couldn’t tell right from wrong (i.e., if they are morally blind), they wouldn’t be sinning, but if they are making a claim to know right from wrong, they are subject to the Law and sin.

The now-sighted man is thus given a new life. He can see. But more than this, he has been given eternal life. And he is our stand in. When John Newton wrote “Amazing Grace”, he included the line that this man spoke. “I was blind, but now I see.” That’s us. But like the blind man, we can see that our life is in Jesus. And seeing is believing. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.