



**Day 4 | Sunday, March 10, 2024**  
**Presenter: Sarah Pericich-Lopez**

Today, I am honored to share with you all the story of a beloved disciple of Jesus. This disciple's life and commitment to Jesus is exemplary and asks us to consider: What are we willing to do to have a life as a disciple of Jesus?

We are first introduced to this beloved disciple at the beginning of John chapter 9 and I will give you a hint, it is not one of the persons walking with Jesus in the first few verses. Rather, the person the text invites us to consider modeling our life after is the visually impaired man who Jesus and his disciples encounter along the way. In verse 2 the disciples ask Jesus, "who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Questions aimed at placing blame or understanding individual or intergenerational familial sin to make sense of a person's disablement were not uncommon for this time as we know from various Old Testament passages that allude to the belief that we could possibly pinpoint the reason for someone's impairment.

Jesus' response corrects the disciples' misinformed beliefs. He replies, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's work might be revealed in him." I want us to take a moment of pause because what Jesus does in this moment is say, "this belief that has equated failure of moral character to impairment and also been utilized to cast people out of communal living is wrong. This person has been created by God for a divine purpose." Wow, what a powerful statement! When I think about Jesus

showing up in my life in this way, I can assume the visually impaired man felt acknowledged, known, embraced, solidarity, trust and that this is a God he can follow.

In verses 4 to 5, Jesus reminds the disciples that they are not called to reinforce the systems of hierarchy in the world, but are to be in solidarity with the marginalized. Jesus then acts upon the visually impaired man by anointing his eyes with mud and then commands him to wash himself in the pool of Siloam. This invitation to be anointed and washed evokes baptismal imagery. In this man's willingness to go to the pool of Siloam, he teaches us that one of the most important qualities of discipleship is obedience, and specifically obedience rooted in trust. When Jesus acts upon the man and commands him to wash himself, the man could have responded with contempt, but instead he obeys. And, I think the reason for this is because of how Jesus treated him with dignity from the first moment he gazed upon him. So, our first challenge to becoming disciples of Jesus is to be obedient!

When the man returns from Siloam the text affirms that he is able to "see." It's important to note that this Greek word for, "see" actually has nothing to do with visual sight. The Greek translation for this version of seeing is "to arise into being with the power of understanding or to follow the One." We can hypothesize and debate about whether this man was actually cured of his impairment, but the author of this text is trying to communicate something very specific about the transformative nature of this man's encounter with Jesus. He is not crowned with the title of disciple because he moves from disabled to able, but because he encounters Jesus authentically in his disablement, is anointed by Jesus, trusts in Jesus' invitation, washes himself in the baptismal waters of Siloam, which means he identifies himself with Jesus, and returns knowing who Jesus is and is committed to following him. Not only is our discipleship dependent on our obedience, but our commitment to seeing and following.

Upon witnessing his transformation the man's neighbors struggled to understand what had happened to him and began to press him with many questions. Responding to their curiosities if he was the man they had known to be formerly impaired, he proclaims, "I am." The "I am" statement in this case utilizes the language of the great "I am" from Exodus chapter 3 verse 14 when God reveals Godself to Moses. Can you imagine, someone comes to question your identity in a public space and you pull the great "I Am?" The formerly visually impaired man teaches us that to be a true disciple of Jesus is to have your gaze so transfixed on God that even when others cannot believe in your newness, you know you are the Beloved and are unashamed of making it clear to others who you belong to.

After professing his connection to God, the man is forced to respond to more questioning. His neighbors continue to press him and he tells the story of his encounter with the man named Jesus who cured him of his impairment. Through his sharing of his experience with Jesus, the man demonstrates that to be a disciple we must glorify God through our storytelling with the intention of drawing others nearer to God. In order to truly step into our role of disciple we must ask: Who needs to hear how God has impacted my life and how can I inspire others to become curious about their own Belovedness?

In verse 13 the neighbors are disoriented by the man's story and so they bring him before the Pharisees who also questioned him. In sharing his testimony, we learn that Jesus encountered and acted upon the man on the Sabbath, which would have been forbidden. Now, the Pharisees shift their concern from the man to Jesus and begin building a case against him. When asked about the nature of Jesus, the man responded, "He is a prophet." And to proclaim that someone is a prophet elevated them to having religious authority and in this case the same authority of Moses. This section of the passage highlights that one of the more difficult aspects of being a disciple is pronouncing the name of God, even when others are challenged by our assertions.

After consulting the man's parents, the Pharisees returned to question the man, and so once more they asked of his experience. This time, when he spoke of the power of Jesus the Pharisees were enraged and so they threw him out. The man once more confronted being cast out from the community, this time not for his disability but his love of Jesus. The formerly visually impaired man answered Jesus' call from verse 4 to his disciples to be in solidarity with the marginalized. The man risked the potential to be a member of the community to be in solidarity with the least among them, who this time was Jesus. Discipleship requires us to risk our comfort to be in solidarity with God's beloved children. The man shows fearlessness and immense courage in his decision to align himself with Jesus. How can we be more fearless and courageous to embrace solidarity with confidence?

In the final scene of the text, Jesus comes to the side of the man after he had been thrown out. Jesus asks him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" to which the man affirms, "I do believe, Lord." In verses 13 through 17 and then again in 35 through 38, the man shows us that the most important role of a disciple is to profess Jesus as Messiah. We see in verse 17 that the man only knows Jesus as Prophet, but as he comes to understand more of Jesus' identity, he confidently declares Jesus is Lord. It would seem there is no better way to live out discipleship as the Beloved than by honoring our Lover with Their correct and most reverent title, Lord.

So, all we have to do to imitate the discipleship of the visually impaired man is: be obedient, transfix our gaze onto God, confidently step into our identity as Beloved, glorify God with our stories and life, live in solidarity with the marginalized and proclaim Jesus is Lord. Easy enough right? When I look at this list I immediately feel overwhelmed and unqualified. I am not sure if I even do one of these things well per day let alone all of them! Yet, when I return to the beginning of the passage I am struck by two things.

First, the passage begins with the disciples encountering the visually impaired man and asking a pretty unintentional and hurtful question about the man's disability. And we know from other passages within the Bible that Jesus is often frustrated with his disciples, that one will betray him and his best friend will denounce him. But, even with their messiness, they are still honored with the title of disciple!

The second is Jesus' separation of sinfulness from disability, and acknowledgment that all are created by God with the purpose of being revelatory and disciples. God created us and understands us as Beloved, and this title and relationship to the Lover alone qualifies us for discipleship. God does not need our perfection, but only desires our heart and commitment to follow.