Mud, Wash, Healing, Sight

It takes the entire ninth chapter of John's gospel to tell the rest of the story of this healing. We just heard the beginning of the story in today's Scripture. I want to tell you the whole story.

It's a long story, and compared to most stories in the gospels it has a big cast of characters: Jesus, the disciples, the blind man, the blind man's neighbors, the blind man's parents, the Pharisees.

The story unfolds in eight scenes:

**Scene 1**: Jesus is walking along, and his disciples ask him about the origins of blindness.

**Scene 2**: Jesus makes mud and applies it to a blind man's eyes.

**Scene 3**: The man goes and washes in a pool as Jesus told him to. Now he can see!

**Scene 4**: The man's neighbors try to figure out what happened.

That's as far as we got in the Scripture we heard this morning. Here's the rest of the story:

**Scene 5**: The Pharisees call the man in for questioning.

**Scene 6**: The Pharisees call the man's parents in for questioning.

**Scene 7**: The Pharisees call the man in for questioning a second time. He questions their questions, so they insult him and drive him out of the synagogue.

**Scene 8**: Jesus seeks the man out, he accepts Jesus as the Messiah, but the Pharisees still don't believe in Jesus.

That's a lot of activity and a big cast of characters for one story in the gospels. Here's something else unusual about today's Scripture--did you notice that Jesus appears only at the beginning and the end of the story?

Jesus heals the man, disappears from the story, and then comes back at the end of the story to talk with the man he healed.

Kind of like our story--the story of the church: Jesus appears at the beginning of the story of the church, he disappears from the world for a while, and he will return to the world
at the end of the story.

A lot happens in between Jesus' two appearances in the world, and a lot happens in between his two appearances in this story of healing.

The story begins when Jesus sees a blind man. The disciples ask if the man was born blind because of his own sins or because of his parents' sins.

Jesus says, "Neither one."

He's teaching them not to focus on who's to blame when things go wrong. Instead, he wants them to try to see how God is working in every situation.

That's a lesson many of us still need to learn today: What God is doing to make things right is always more important than blaming somebody for what's wrong.

So now comes the healing, and it's a strange one.

The man doesn't come to Jesus and ask for healing. Jesus approaches him. Jesus doesn't ask the man if he has faith or even if he's a good person.

Jesus just gets to work. He spits on the ground, makes mud with the saliva, spreads the mud over the blind man's eyes, and tells the man to go wash himself in a pool of water.

Why does Jesus go through all this hocus pocus? Why doesn't he just say, "OK, you can see now" and immediately give the man his sight?

Well, how did you get your sight?

Remember in the gospels--especially in John's gospel--sight doesn't just mean seeing with your eyes.

At the end of today's healing story, for example, Jesus says, "I entered this world to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind."

The Pharisees ask, "Are you saying we're blind?"

And Jesus answers, "If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty. But you remain guilty because you claim you can see."

Sight is not only about how well your eyes work.

How did you get your spiritual sight?

Were you born with 20/20 spiritual vision? Or did your faith and understanding and
Christian way of living develop in you gradually, aided by the efforts of your family, your teachers, your ministers, your church?

I think that's what Jesus was teaching when he went through all the steps he did in healing the blind man in today's story. Our faith, our understanding, and our Christian lives develop gradually, a step at a time.

And did you notice that Jesus didn't do all the work of healing himself?
He asked the man to do something to help himself: "Go wash yourself in the pool."
The blind man had to take responsibility for part of his own healing. He had to go wash the mud from his eyes.
Mud, wash, healing, sight. One step at a time. That's how we learn; that's how we're healed.

The man comes back from the pool, and now he can see for the first time in his life.
This should be a happy day for everyone, but most people aren't happy about it.
Some of the man's neighbors won't believe it's really him--changed, healed, a man who can see.
"No, it looks like him, but it can't be him. People can't change like that--a blind man can't become a man who sees things clearly."
Instead of being happy for the man, his neighbors are upset that Jesus healed him on the Sabbath.
"You're not supposed to do work on the Sabbath."
I guess some people can find fault with anything--even a miracle. No wonder there are so many unhappy people in the world.
Finding fault, complaining, and judging everything don't make us happy. They might give us a temporary feeling of power or superiority--of being in charge or being important or being better than other people.
But finding fault, complaining, and judging everything don't make anybody happy.
We should all try to be more positive and more grateful for all the good things God does in our lives and in the lives of others. We'll be happier and we'll be better Christians.
Back to the story:
The neighbors of the man born blind take him to the Pharisees—the religious authorities.

They're divided on the subject of Jesus.

Is he behind door number 1: "He can't be from God—he worked on the Sabbath."

Or is he behind door number 2: "He must be from God or he couldn't be doing all these miracles. But who should get the credit?"

How about door number 3, a door the Pharisees didn't even consider: "A man who was blind now can see. Jesus healed him. He's our neighbor; let's just be glad for him."

I think Jesus is behind door number 3, and the door is always open.

But the Pharisees aren't happy for the man. In fact, they don't believe that a man who was blind now can see.

They call his parents in for questioning—kind of a parent/Pharisee conference. "Is this your son? Was he blind, and, if so, how come he can see now?"

The parents won't say how their son was healed or who healed him. They're afraid they'll get kicked out of the synagogue, their congregation, if they tell the truth.

It's easier to pass the buck. "He's old enough to speak for himself; ask him."

So the Pharisees call the man who had been blind back again.

"Why do you want to hear it again?" he asks. "Do you want to become his disciples too?"

I think he's pulling their legs here, taunting them a little. Nobody thinks the Pharisees want to become disciples of Jesus.

The Pharisees curse the man for even suggesting it and throw him out of the synagogue.

The man has had a rough day. He can see now, but his neighbors don't recognize him or believe him, the religious authorities interrogate him, curse him, and throw him out, even his parents won't stick up for him.

When Jesus hears what happened to the man, Jesus goes out looking for him. Imagine that for a minute. Jesus hears that you had a rough day, and he goes out looking for you.
He has already healed you, given you the ability and the wisdom to see things clearly, to see what's really important in life.

You've tried to do your part too--you've washed the mud from your eyes. You come to church, you read your Bible, you say your prayers.

But still, maybe your day didn't quite go the way you wanted, the way you hoped. Work was so hard you don't know whether to be afraid you might lose your job or be afraid you might not lose your job. Your head aches and your feet hurt.

There are bills on the table for things you don't even remember you bought. The kids are fighting. You're trying to figure out your income taxes.

Your husband or wife or too many of your loved ones in your church family have passed away these last few years. Things look pretty dark.

Jesus hears what happened to you, and he comes looking for you, and he finds you.

"I am the light of the world," Jesus tells you. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."

"I know," you answer. "I once was blind, but now I see. You haven't solved all my problems for me. Life can still be hard and painful sometimes. But I can see you clearly now, Jesus.

Mud, wash, healing, sight.

I'm glad you found me, and I will follow you."