

Pray More Healing Retreat 2020 - Transcript

May Christ Heal All Our Blindness

Kevin Heider

Hi, my name is Kevin Heider. I am a singer songwriter, performer, recording artist. I also do some work with video graphic design. I have a podcast, I enjoy the arts. I enjoy all things creative, and I am a storyteller at heart. If you participated in the pray more Lenten retreat this past Lent, then you have some idea what to expect with this presentation. Basically, in just a few moments, I am going to disappear. And for the remainder of the video, you will be looking at a painting a work of sacred art, and we're going to reflect and meditate on it together. If this seems a little cheesy, or lame to you, please give it a shot. I have found that sitting with works of sacred art and meditating on them can be a truly unique and profound way to encounter God. To contemplate, what is true and what is good, by basking in something beautiful. And so we begin this meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. To you, oh Lord, I lift up my soul, my God, in you I trust. Make known to me Your ways, Lord, teach me your paths, guide me by your fidelity and teach me. For you are God my savior. For you, I wait all the day long. Remember no more the sins of my youth. Remember me according to your mercy, because of your goodness, Lord, Amen.

A few years ago, I was trying to find a more classical that is an older sacred painting, depicting one of the healing miracles of Christ. And that's when I stumbled across this one. I was struck by it immediately, from the look of the characters to the artist's use of chiaroscuro emphasis on the play and contrast of light and dark. Everything about this painting is reminiscent of a Caravaggio, and if you remember my presentation from the Lenten retreat, you may recall that I love Caravaggio's work, but while Caravaggio was active in the late 1500s and early 1600s, this painting was brought to life in 2009. And that gives me hope that there are contemporary artists who are still very much interested in depicting sacred scenes seriously, and with such capable artistry.

The title of this work is Christ and the beggar and it's by Russian painter Andre Nikolayevich Mironov. I apologize if I just butchered that pronunciation. It seemed fitting to reflect on this work. In light of this being a healing retreat. That's the scene being depicted, after all, Christ is healing the man born blind. The first thing I noticed about this painting, when I first saw it, was that we aren't really shown

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the face of Christ. We don't get a clear picture of Him in this image. Our view is only from behind His face isn't visible to us. So it would seem that Christ isn't the focus. And yet, as with Caravaggio's iconic the incredulity of St. Thomas, it is the personal encounter with Christ. That is ultimately what's on display.

Maybe you've seen the classic 1959 epic Ben-Hur starring Charlton Heston. This painting actually reminds me of that movie in this respect. While the film's title was shortened to Ben-Hur, the full title of the book that the film is based on, is Ben-Hur, a tale of the Christ. The film is over three and a half hours long, and the audience only ever sees Jesus, either from a distance or from behind. We never actually get to see his face. And yet, the film is entirely about the personal encounter with Christ. The camera repeatedly lingers on the faces of various characters during the moments in which they stand face to face with Jesus and encounter his person and his power up close. That's what's happening here Mironov's canvas. This painting could well be titled, "The man born blind." A tale of the Christ.

Here's the scene according to the gospel of John 9:1-7. *As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi who sinned this man or his parents, that he was born blind." Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned." It is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day, night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. When he had said this, 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.*

When I first saw this painting, I immediately assumed that this image depicted the moment after the man was healed. That the look on his face was one of awe in gratitude at the miracle of finally being able to see. But then I realized, no, this is the moment right before the healing occurs. Christ isn't pulling his hand away. He's about to rub the clay in the blind man's eyes. The Miracle hasn't actually occurred yet. The healing process is about to begin. The man's face is illuminated by the light of Christ, the light of the world and it is by the light of Christ healing grace, that he is about to finally see the world. The look on his face reveals the anticipation of the healing hoped for the healing so long desired. Just imagine this anticipation. Imagine that it's you.

You have been judged a sinner, the child of sinners, rejected by your own community for your entire life, all because you were born without the sense of sight. As you sat begging for food and money day after day, you would have

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overheard so many conversations and murmurings of potential prophets and teachers and wise men over the years. But the new rumor is that there's a healer, a miracle worker making his way from town to town. "He can turn water into wine," they say. People talk about him with genuine curiosity and with trepidation. He seems to stir up trouble everywhere he goes, as he forgives sins fraternizes with tax collectors, dines with prostitutes, lifts up the poor and rebukes the self righteous elders who cling to their privileged positions of authority. And then, one day, sitting by the same public pool, you've sat at begging every day for years. You hear some students ask their teacher, rabbi who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? They're talking about you. The question itself, makes you feel ashamed to be you.

But rather than confirm this false narrative, this false perception you've always believed about yourself. This Rabbi flips the question like a table in the temple. ***"Neither he nor his parents sinned," The rabbi says. He was born blind, so that the works of God might be made visible through him.*** "What?" you wonder, "through me?" How could the works of God possibly be made visible through me? And that's when you realize that the rumors are true that this is the miracle worker. This is the healer you've heard so many people arguing about and he's here for you. And you realize that, for the first time in your life spent in darkness, you are about to see all the light of the world.

How would you feel? What would your face reveal? On this face, I see so many things, all stemming from anticipation. Hope, this is what I've longed for my whole life. Excitement. What will I see? What will the world look like? A hint of fear and nervousness. Will it hurt? Will it even work? Wonder? Is this actually happening? And and how? And why me? And is this the Christ? Oh God, please may your works be visible through me. Click, a photo is taken right as Christ reaches to apply the clay, the tool of the potter to make his creation new.

This is the moment that a young Russian artist captured through the lens of his paintbrush 2000 years later. The moment just before the miracle occurred. The moment just before a man who needed healing received it. Offering a brief note about the work on his website, Mironov says of this painting, quote, "The hand of a beggar stretched out for arms symbolizes the hand of the beggar, asking for spiritual charity. This person is the image of a beggar in spirit. The right hand of Christ holding the clay from the earth symbolizes the hand of the giver. The light that revives the face of a man born blind and fills it with colors is the light of creation. For the light of truth, has already seen the one asking before his healing." I love that last part, "For the light of truth has already seen the one asking before his healing."

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We are all beggars really, and we are all hurt, broken or wounded in some way. We all need healing in some form from a variety of physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional ailments and scars. Like the beggar in the Gospel and in Mironov's painting, we must humbly ask for spiritual charity and bask in the hope that the light of truth can hear us asking and see us begging. Healing is a process. Even once the good doctor has applied the mud and the spit, our call, daily, is to go wash

I mentioned at the very beginning of this video, that I am a singer songwriter. While I wear a lot of creative hats. I consider the art of telling stories through song to be my primary mode of artistic expression. Well, I'd like to close this reflection with a song in the summer of 2008, about one year before Andre Mironov painted this work. I wrote a song called, "Eyes wide open." Both this painting and my song, were the result of personal meditations on the same gospel account of an encounter with the person and power of Christ. Where Mironov's painting is a prayer for healing from physical blindness. My song eyes wide open is a prayer for healing from spiritual blindness, from blind indifference to the injustices around us. It's a prayer for the grace to care.

If I were lonely and I were blind Where, oh, where would I go to find life Would I say, David's Son, would you be so kind to spit in some mud and put it in my eyes 'cause in this world of good intentions that pave the road to, no, I won't mention where, I need to take my fears and bleed them dry 'cause I can't see clearly when I try to care how can I climb Your ladder up when Your blood's still in the cup how can I love my neighbor home when I'm still so blind and alone In this world far from disaster-free, full of our man-made catastrophes, we're here searching for the joy found in the pain this little boy has gone insane searching Now at 1 a.m. on a freezer door this artist sits where he's sat before trying, trying to write a song about sorting all our problems out when he's part of them how can he climb Your ladder up when Your blood's still in the cup how can he love his neighbor home, when he's still so blind and alone 'cause in this world of good intentions that pave the road to, no, I won't mention where I pray "Jesus, would you be so kind to spit in some mud and put it in my eyes because I can't climb Your ladder up If I don't drink what's in the cup and I can't love my neighbor home If I'm still so blind and alone, Which I am I'm blind and alone.