

John 9:1-41

1 As he walked 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 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." 10 But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." 12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. 17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." 18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I have told you already,

and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" 28 Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." 38 He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

"Mud Pies and Miracles"

Rev. Leanne B. Thompson

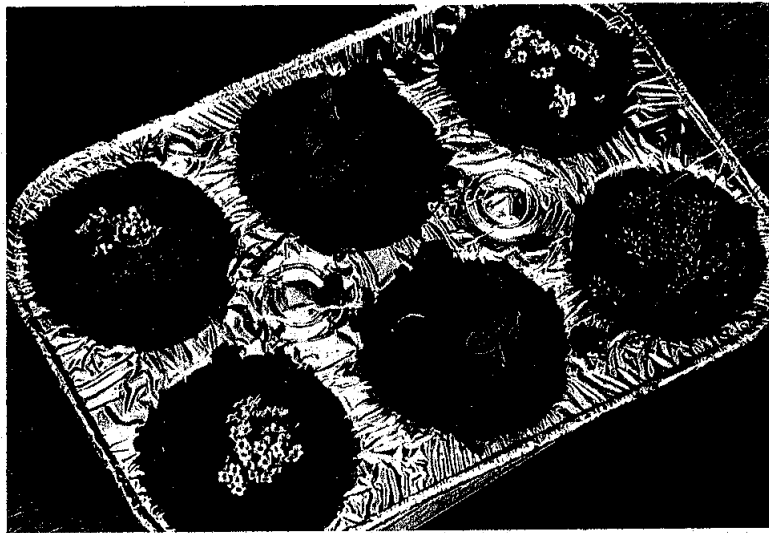
First Presbyterian Church of Willmar, MN

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How many of you experienced something in your childhood that looked like this...



Or this...



Or this...



Mud is part of childhood! It's not so much a part of adulthood. When was the last time you looked like this?

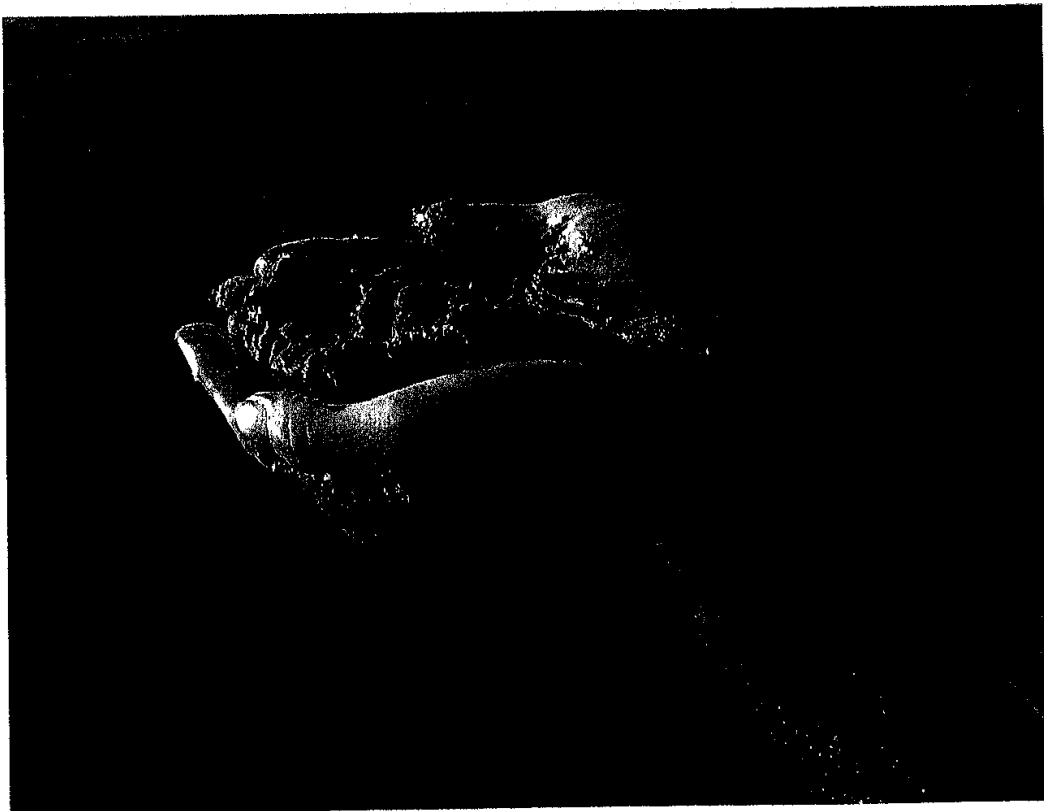


These folks aren't just reclaiming their childhood. These are visitors to the Dead Sea who have heard the tales of the healing properties of Dead Sea Mud. Visitors to the Dead Sea coat themselves in mud and float in its buoyant salty waters. It is said that the mud of the Dead Sea heals skin conditions like eczema and psoriasis, eases the discomfort of arthritis, relaxes muscles and provides inner calm. I suspect most of us are skeptical about the potential for mud to heal us. Mud isn't miraculous, it's messy. But Jesus was all about embracing the mess. So, let's talk about that mess, shall we?

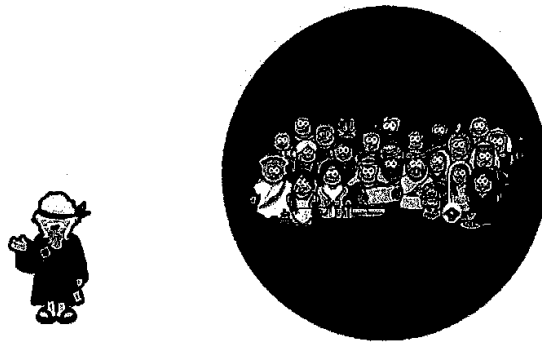
The man in our story – the man who was so invisible he wasn't even given a name – had a problem. He was blind. And his blindness made him an outsider. He was not welcome in the worshiping life of the temple and we was, therefore, outside the bounds of acceptable and respectable culture.

But he wasn't the only one who had a problem. The insiders – his devout neighbors and the religious leaders – had a problem as well. They weren't born blind. But they couldn't see. Or, more precisely, they lacked the ability to believe what their eyes were telling them. Their vision was so poor that they couldn't recognize the outsider they had walked past every day of his life. They were so spiritually blind they couldn't recognize a miracle for what it was – because it would have meant accepting Jesus as the Messiah.

Our nameless friend, had no such problem. He recognized the touch of the Master, the touch that healed and restored his vision. He had no problem accepting that he had just been part of a miracle. I suspect it was a matter of perspective. The devout of the community were witnessing the miracle from a distance – in their ivory towers and from atop the pillars of status they had built for themselves.

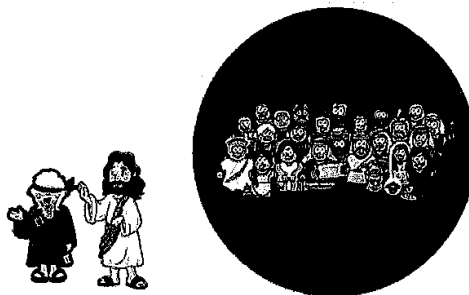



Through no choice of his own, through no fault of his own or his parents – Jesus makes that very clear – this man is an outsider, excluded by the faithful on the inside of the circle who have built for themselves a safe enclosure.



Inside their circle they follow the rules and traditions that define them as God's holy people. Inside the circle they know what measures to know if they are clean enough, and good enough, and righteous enough. And the man born blind – he and the rest of the outcasts like him don't measure up. And so the devout inside the circle build strong clear boundaries so that they aren't sullied by the unclean, so that they don't become guilty by association.

And Jesus does something deeply disturbing to them.





Jesus, a good, faithful Jewish man – a Rabbi – steps outside the circle. Jesus steps outside of tradition and law to stand beside the man born blind. To touch the man born blind and heal him in an intimate and messy way.

Jesus stands outside the circle with mud on his hands and says – if you want me in the circle, you have to make the circle big enough to include him, too.

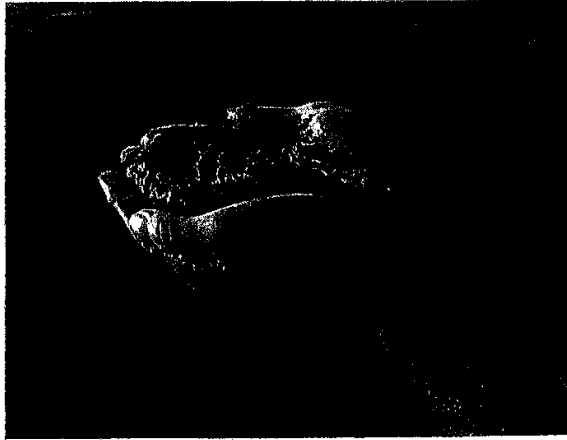
But they just can't do it. The mud and the miracle are too much for them. They are blind to the significance of what happened because to see would mean that they would have to widen the circle, and to widen the circle would mean admitting they were wrong. And they can't be wrong; so they remain blind to grace.

It's easy for us to criticize the devout for their spiritual blindness, but we aren't so different from them. We don't believe miracles can come from mud either, not really. And we are skeptical – cynical, even – when it comes to believing that people can really change or grow.

Like the religiously faithful in our story, we put infinite amounts of energy into maintaining our own circles of safety. Let me ask you:

- When have we looked away so we didn't have to acknowledge another in need, afraid that if we noticed we would have to do something?
- When have we judged someone for how they looked rather than recognizing them as a beloved child of God?
- When have we labeled a person – assigned them to a category – rather than taken the time to learn their names?
- When have we seen someone as a problem to be solved without attention to what our solution was costing them?

I challenge you to live with those questions this week, to pause in your journey long enough to notice the unnoticeable, to touch the untouchable, to really look for Jesus. I assure you, Jesus will be standing next to someone who is just outside your circle of comfort.



Jesus will be standing there with mud on his hands inviting you to be part of the miracle. Wouldn't it be great to shake off the conventions of adulthood and respectability to get your hands dirty with childlike abandon and be part of the something beautiful that Jesus is creating in the world?

Alleluia! Amen.