

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

March 15, 2026



SEE

on wholeness and ability

by Drew Downs

The church often has a shorthand for the times when Jesus gives sight or removes leprosy from someone. We tend to call these “healing stories”. It is a generous, if not ableist term. Some of these involve people who are not broken or sick, so Jesus isn’t “fixing” them. Our lumping all of it together is therefore less than generous — just easy. While some seek to account for this by highlight the difference in the stories, I want to speak to our bigger picture pursuit.

Jesus is driven by a theology of Shalom. Which is a big word for peace, equity, justice, health, and wholeness. It involves restoration and fullness. While most of our rhetoric around disability revolve around accuracy and personal rights, the gospel is focused on demonstrating what wholeness looks like. It isn’t about “fixing” or labeling individuals but ensuring they’re free, healthy, and whole. And Jesus keeps inviting us to see new ways we’ve let others fall through the cracks.

LENT

2026

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Living Water

Last week's gospel passage involved Jesus's conversations with a Samaritan woman by a well. It is a rich story with a ton of different ways into it. And it, like the other gospels we read during the season of Lent (and into Easter, shhh! we're not there yet, though!) offer some themes that run through all of these readings like a through line. The first one is obvious in this week's gospel: seeing. Jesus definitely has a double-intention for that word! Watch for how that one plays out throughout. Especially the last verses from the gospel, when the Samaritans declare that it is no longer *just* that they believed because of the testimony of the woman at the well, but that they heard it themselves. Remember this idea when we get to Thomas in a number of weeks . . .

Another theme I like to follow like an underground current are the references to living water. They connect his baptism in the Jordan to the wedding feast at Cana to this moment, when he promises the Samaritan woman water that is better than the water in Jacob's well, because it isn't just water.

Living water isn't branding for spring water bottled for suburban soccer moms or the hocus pocus magic handwaving over the well, but something true, perhaps even the realized eschaton of Jesus's love in a fixed moment in time that cannot be parsed or separated into physical or spiritual, but is real and always and now and forever and internal and spiritual and external and universal and everything everywhere and all at once. And, as we'll see, living water that can bring sight to the blind . . . and blind the sighted.

With love,
Drew+

LENT

2026

FOR SUNDAY

Lent 3A

March 8, 2026

Collect

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

from John 9:1-41

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 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." 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. 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." ...

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. 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." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

LENT

Reflection

It is hard to read the story of the man born blind and not get mad. The authorities are being cruel. The man's parents sell out their son. And it all seems willful and intentionally harsh. Like these people want to be right more than they want to figure out what is right.

This is also a story that can easily fit into the box of "healing stories" into which we toss the man oppressed by a legion of demons in Mark or the two blind men healed before Jesus enters Jerusalem in Matthew or the countless others we just assume are healed and everything just goes well for them.

This story cleverly plays with the pairing of physical and spiritual sight. It is clearly the main thrust of the story, suggesting that some who see things super clearly are just not going to be the ones who see God at work in the world. And this duality feels particularly deep, doesn't it?

What is this spiritual blindness about though? I think the story can help us look into this part, too.

It is noticeable how driven the spiritual leaders are by the physical seeing (obviously at the expense of the spiritual seeing). Jesus undermines the absoluteness of the physical by not sticking around, by not walking the man who was born blind to the pools to wash off. It means that he can't be seen in the act – we must trust that it has happened as he claims. In other words, it isn't just a question of seeing and it isn't just the duality of seeing physically and spiritually, but also a third factor of believing those who do see.

This story is as much about the insidious threat of rejecting the witness of one who can see as it is an invitation to be the one who can truly see.

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