

**Left Out. Kicked Out. Welcomed Home. (John 9)**  
**Sunday, September 24, 2023**  
**By Mark Archibald**

I want to start this morning by giving high praise to teachers. There are a number of school teachers at First B, and I want to acknowledge the excellent work that they do. I've had excellent experiences with the school teachers in our church. We as "the Archibalds" have had excellent experiences with every one of the teachers and staff that has taught and supported our son at St. Pat's. School. Our church is richer for the presence of many retired school teachers and administrators at First B, and we are wiser for their contributions. I can't speak for everyone's experience with every teacher ever. But I can speak for my own experience with school teachers and school staff. And I've got to admit, I'm a fan.

This is one of the many reasons that the protests in Lethbridge and across Canada on Wednesday bothered me. People gathered angrily and accused our teachers and school staff and schools of a lot of things. The vast majority of things protested were untrue, and the rest were misunderstandings. (But it was still misunderstanding done loudly and with confidence.) Protestors accused school teachers and school admin of things they aren't doing, and things they don't have time to do. Protestors took policies that schools make to do their best to protect kids, and used them instead to accuse teachers of abuse.

You may not agree with all that I said. Like any event or moment, we all see things from different perspectives. However, these protests on Wednesday had real and negative of affects on people that we know, on people that are part of our church community. Protests like these have real consequences on the perceived and real safety of people involved in education, and have real consequences on anyone with LGBTQ family. What some will praise as standing for truth had absolutely nothing to do with the commission, commands or mission of Jesus.

This part is the most difficult for me: you know where maybe the majority of recent accusations come from against teachers? Christians. And churches. You know: the "nice" people. The "good" people. The fruit of the spirit people. The hands and feet of Jesus in the world people. And it's not just a few Christians are doing this. It's A LOT of Christians!

But it's not surprising. I wish it were, but it's not. This is our inherited legacy of religion. This is nothing new. This is something we trace all the way back to John chapter 9.

In John 9 we meet the man born blind. I wish he had a name. That would make this sermon so much less awkward than it's been so far. But he's the man born blind in John 9, or frequently referred to as "the man". The man epitomizes someone who has been left out. He doesn't seem to really belong anywhere. He is, in blindness, begging just to get by.

In John 9, people seem to talk about him but not to him. People debate – why is he blind? Did his parents sin? Did he sin? These are the kinds of conversations that are around him.

And so, without asking, Jesus spits on the ground, makes mud with saliva, and spreads the mud over the blind man's eyes. He did not ask to be healed. He did not ask for mud, for spit mud, to be smeared on his eyes. And then Jesus tells him to go wash in the pool, and he can see!

What an opportunity for celebration! A man that was born blind can see. Again, his neighbours talk about him, not to him, in their confusion. "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" "No, he just looks like him." He was so left out that they weren't even sure what he looked like! And so the man interjects, "Yes, I am the same one!"

But this still doesn't lead to celebration. This leads to more questions! "Who healed you?" "Where is he now?"

He gives answers. The man called Jesus made mud, spread it in my eyes and told me to wash. But an answer he gives more than once in the passage is "I don't know."

The man gets taken to the religious people, the Pharisees. Again, something he did not ask for. And he is not taken to the religious people so they can share in his joy. He is taken for further inspection.

When he declares, with joy I assume, that he can see, the religious leaders respond with doubt, suspicion and accusation. "This man Jesus was not from God for he was working on the Sabbath." Then debate between the church folk begins, not with the man, but about the man, in his presence. "But how could an ordinary sinner do such miraculous signs?" they ask about Jesus.

The blind man comes to church and is not invited to a celebration but to a debate. About him. While he's there.

When they do return attention to the man, they ask, "What's your opinion about this man that healed you?" The man doesn't quite know: "I think he must be a prophet".

They don't like what he says about Jesus. It can't possibly be true. They refused to believe that the man had been blind and could now see. So they call for his parents and their testimony.

The parents are scared of the religious people. They were scared of getting kicked out of church for giving wrong answers, or even answers that could be misunderstood. They say, "we don't know how he can see or who healed him. He is of age ask him." Saying "he's a grown up, ask him," is not acknowledging his ability – it's their way of saying, "leave us out of this."

Like many kids since John 9 took place, the man is another kid whose parents keep their distance when their life doesn't line up with what the church teaches. He's another kid sacrificed to the parents' need to keep up good appearances at church. He doesn't fit the experience of a good church kid, so out of fear of the religious people at church, he's kept at a distance by family and looked at suspiciously by church folk.

The lack of definite answers is driving the Pharisees crazy. It's starting to make them hostile. These are God's people, and God's people honor the truth. They will stomp and holler and yell and protest so that everyone will know that they stand for the truth! They demand certainty. They demand straight answers. They demand to know what the man thinks about Jesus. They say, "God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus was a sinner."

They hope to corner the man into the answers they want him to give. He does not know much, but he's increasingly confident in what he does know. "I don't know whether he is a sinner. But I know this: I was blind and now I can see."

More grilling. More questions! "But what did he do?" "How did he heal you?"

The man has asked for none of this. He never asked for healing. He never asked for mud spit in his eyes. He never asked for joyless interviews. He never asked to be brought before the Pharisees. He never asked for his parents to sacrifice him for their own status at church. He's always been left out, continues to be left out, and has nothing to lose. He has these few things he knows to be true, and he declares, "ENOUGH!" "Look! I told you once. Didn't you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

People who love the idea of truth they can master and own don't like questions like that. The religious people loved certainty. They loved straight answers. They loved anything they could state loudly and clearly and with authority.

The man doesn't have the amount of certainty they have. But what he now knows, he knows well. He says, "We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but he is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will. Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. If this man weren't from God, he couldn't have done it."

That's it. That's all he knows. The religious leaders hate this – he is kicked out. "You were born a total sinner! Are you trying to teach us?"

This is a lot of people's experience with religion, with the church, with Christians, with Christianity. People come with real, lived experience. And when that real, lived experience does not line up with what the church believes these people are kicked out. It's not always as forceful as being kicked out or asked to leave. But when you go through some life experiences you notice that people keep their distance. They don't know what to do with you so they stay away.

People love this big idea of truth. They love that they can know it and possess it. But if you're real experience conflicts with their truth, either you or their truth has got to go. And most times, people are going to hold things they can believe clearly and loudly at the expense of other people.

The man has been left out and kicked out. But Jesus welcomes him home.

Once again, something the man did not ask for happens to him. Jesus looks for him. Jesus has caused him nothing but healing and nothing but trouble. But Jesus seeks him out.

***<sup>35</sup> When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?<sup>[c]</sup>”***

***<sup>36</sup> The man answered, “Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him.”***

***<sup>37</sup> “You have seen him,” Jesus said, “and he is speaking to you!”***

***<sup>38</sup> “Yes, Lord, I believe!” the man said. And he worshiped Jesus.***

But Jesus welcomes him. Jesus invites him.

The man does not know much. But he knows what he has been through. He knows his history, his experiences, he knows what is true in his life, and it all matches up with Jesus. He is willing to give all to follow Jesus who is with him, for him and seeking him.

You will believe things about God, Jesus and the Bible. And then you will meet people whose life experience does not line up with the things you believe. Even scarier, you will have life experiences yourself that do not line up with your beliefs about God, Jesus or the Bible. The temptation is to hold tightly to your belief or your idea and push away the people. The temptation is to take real things that we experience, push them down deep inside, and ignore them so that we can hold our beliefs.

Don't give in to this temptation. Jesus is not seeking your fully formed, robust beliefs. Jesus is seeking you. Like the man in John 9, those things that people care about – firm belief, the opinion of strong-willed religious people, the approval of others, your status in church. Those things really don't matter. Like the man, you'll find you never had those things anyway. But what you can have is Jesus. Not because you have pleased him, but because he is gracious, and merciful, and just and he seeks you out.

We think we are Christians because we have well defined beliefs. It's not true. We are Christians because Jesus is faithful to us. Jesus is seeking us. Jesus is true.