

Interactive lesson



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-woman-drawing-on-white-paper-3817559/>

Can I have some volunteers?

Only show this side the picture.

Now, you are to describe it to all of them and have them try to draw an exact copy. Ready? Go!

OK, let's see the results.

Why is it not exact?

Did seeing the picture make drawing it easier? Why?

Would being able to erase mistakes be helpful?

What about color?

We live in a sin-filled world trying to live as God called us to do. How well do you think we match God's image for our lives?

How does knowing Jesus help us at matching God's image for our lives?

Jesus is the picture we strive to copy. He helps us correct our mistakes and refocus on what we need to develop in our lives. God's love brings warmth to our lives akin to color on a page.

Let us all strive to see the beautiful potential within each of us and strive to bring it out in ourselves and others, in the presence of God's love.

Gospel lesson

Just prior to today's Gospel reading, Jesus was teaching in the temple and ruffled some feathers there, so he went out of the temple.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-blind-man-pharisees/>

John 9:1-41

NRSV

¹As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.

²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

³Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.

⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.

⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes,

⁷saying 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."



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-blind-man-pharisees/>

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."



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-blind-man-pharisees/>

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.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Open Our Eyes, Lord">

TFWS #2086

Message: In the Presence



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/learning-to-live-inside-out/fourth-sunday-in-lent-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/fourth-sunday-in-lent-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

God of wisdom,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That our eyes may be opened to your grace, so that we can share your grace with all in this world. Amen.

This week in our "Learning to Live Inside Out" Lenten series, we are "In the Presence":

"Do you know what it is like to be chosen? Well, you do because you were. Our texts this week are about being chosen by God. Most of us don't think that we were chosen, certainly not to be king like David. But surely, we chose the jobs that we do and the hobbies that we pursue and the service that we perform, didn't we? Well, yes. But God chose too. And not just in the past tense, God is still choosing."

Daniel Simons is a psychologist who has studied human awareness. You may be familiar with one of his most

famous videos, “The Monkey Business Illusion.” If not, spoiler alert! Here is the gist of it.

Participants in the perception study were asked to watch a video of two teams of players, white shirts and black shirts, as they passed basketballs to their team members. The study participants were told to count the number of times the white shirts passed the ball.



picture from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGQmdoK_ZfY

At one point during the video, a person in a gorilla suit comes in from one side of the scene, pounds on its chest, and walks out the other side. After watching the video, only about half the participants had noticed the gorilla walking across the stage.

Even those who noticed the gorilla typically missed a couple of other changes that took place during the scene. If you send me an email requesting it, I will send you the youtube link so you can check it out.

The video ends with, “When you’re looking for a gorilla, you often miss other unexpected events.” It illustrates that when our brains focus on what is important, non-essential details are ignored – so that we can keep track of the critical information better for whatever we are doing.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/samuel-david-anointed/>

In our Old Testament reading today, Saul was king and everyone was afraid of his military power. But God told Samuel to focus on someone else to become king instead. When it was time to anoint one of Jesse's sons, Samuel saw physical attributes, but then he listened to God. Because Samuel stayed focused on God, he did not miss the critical detail about one more son watching the sheep, and David was anointed.

The psalmist today stayed focused on the Lord, and was greatly blessed for it rather than getting lost to evil and enemies. We might feel surrounded by evil and want to lash out at the opposition when politicians start fearmongering, but God calls us to love one another, not to harm our enemies.

Consider this quote from Abraham Lincoln: "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" God's love has the power to undo and wash away hate, to brighten the deepest darkness with light. And as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, we are children of the light, to shine God's love throughout the world.

Yet we are blinded by sin. We miss the gorilla in the room because we are focused on other things; we miss sharing life in God's love fully because we get

distracted by sinfulness.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-blind-man-pharisees/>

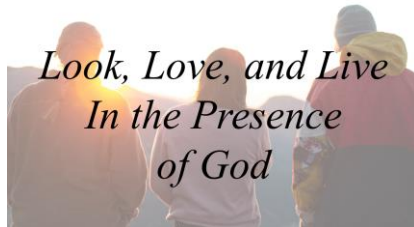
The Pharisees of Jesus's day were focused on obeying the law of Moses to the letter. They "knew" Moses was a man of God without ever having met him, yet when **In the Presence** of Jesus, confronted with Godly power, they refused to believe in the Messiah before them. They were blinded by egos, preconceptions, and sin.

The beggar was asking for help because he was blind, so Jesus healed him - not just physically, but spiritually restored him as well. The man saw what the Pharisees could not: Jesus, filled with God's power, was the Messiah.

Did you notice that Jesus did not just heal the man directly, but told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam to get his sight? The man had to choose to trust in Jesus enough to follow His command. It was not particularly difficult for him to physically do, even blind; he was able to do it very promptly.

How many of us hold off from acting on what God puts on our hearts, and wind up missing out on amazing blessings? Do we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit, or are we blinded by distractions, ego, sin?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about Christian brotherhood not as an ideal that we all have to work for, but as a reality created by God which we can accept now by letting go of our expectations of how others must be or what we should achieve and just being thankful to God for the gifts of each other in Christ.¹



background picture from
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/Learning-to-Live-inside-out/fourth-sunday-in-Lent-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/fourth-sunday-in-Lent-year-a-graphics>

All we need to do to live in Christian fellowship is as Jesus instructed: love God and love one another. Jesus was present on Earth as a model for us to use in drawing our lives, and we are **In the Presence** of the Holy Spirit even now.

We tend to see what we look for. So this week, try to better see God at work around you, and trust God to guide you. Consider where you have preconceived notions, biases that blind us to truth, and work on letting them go. Look for where we can give thanks to God for what we have already, and can play in loving joy with ways to work together for God's glory.

Let us see and celebrate that we are **In the Presence** of the source of all life and love, lighting the world that all may see God's glory and celebrate too.

¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Life Together*, Doberstein, John W., translator (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1954), pp.26-32.