

So often we sail the smart Titanic through the oceans of life and suddenly the bow is ripped open because of the submerged iceberg of our personality, and we take to the lifeboats because we are afraid someone will know.

How wonderful it is to know that Christ not only knows, but he understands, and that forgiveness is given even before we ask for it. That Jesus died on that cross and suffered there for the sins of the world, our sins, our needs. May the Lord grant to each of us today that freshness that comes from being forgiven—from knowing that what happened on Calvary is for us. And may God also grant us that freedom—that enables us to dare to be the person on the outside and on the inside that Christ meant us to be. Thanks be to God for doing that for each of us, right now. Amen.

Encountering Jesus

The Complete Series



A nine-part look at Scriptures that describe coming face to face with Jesus.

Presented by Reverends Tom & Patricia Campbell-Schmitt



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your husband.” She said, “I have no husband.” No, she had had five husbands and the one she was living with was not her husband. Then she said, “I perceive that you are a prophet.” Jesus responded with one of the greatest statements of his ministry—the first declaration, clearly, that he was the Messiah—the presence of the living God. He said, “Woman, the hour is coming, and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit.”

Then the woman said, “I perceive that you are not only a prophet, but when the Messiah comes he will proclaim all things to us.” Then Jesus said, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” What a clear statement from Jesus that he knew what was inside of her because he was the Messiah.

Now what does this mean to you and to me? First of all, it means that God is searching for us. God comes looking for you and me. God comes to us even before we begin to search for God. Secondly, Christ knows all about you. There is nothing that you could tell him that he doesn't know already. So why hide? Even as we hold him at arm's length, Christ knows what we are thinking. Jesus really is the most reliable diagnostician of our needs—because he goes deep beneath the insecurities, the worries, the fears, the doubts, and shows us the raw nerve that causes it all.

Third, consider this. Jesus forgives the past. He stands in the midst of us saying what he said to another woman. “Neither do I condemn you. Go in peace.” Then he says, “You are so much more than your failures in the past. You are your potential.” Someone once responded to the question, “What are your deepest needs” with the answer, “My deepest need is for a friend who knows all about me and won't go away.” I say we all need that kind of friend. Not only one who won't go away, but one who will stay to help us develop the person we really want to be.

Finally, God changes us to become the people we were created to be. The Spirit of God touches the spirit deep inside our hearts and sets us free to be the person we were meant to be. When that happens there is congruency between what is inside and what we live on the outside. We are now set free to really live.

Yet, it's both a comfort and a challenge for us to know that God knows what's inside of us, that God understands those hurts from all the years gone by, those failures that we hope no one will ever know.

between that great God of the mountain and the bleeding sores of her own failure inside. But there at the well she was to meet someone who could make a difference—someone who would enable her to find congruity between the person she was inside, the person she wanted to be, and the person she would dare to be.

Jesus and his disciples had left Judea. They were on their way to Galilee. In between, they had to cross through Samaria—populated by a people who were much hated by the Jews. Now Jesus could have taken another route, one that would have taken them around Samaria; but no, Jesus took that three-day journey right straight through Samaria. Certainly he was teaching—vividly modeling for his disciples—that the hatred between people could no longer be tolerated in his presence.

Before long Jesus comes to the well and it was there that he meets this lonely woman. As he looks at her, compassion, love and care stirred in his inner being. He knew something was wrong and that the blistered defensiveness of her outward life was caused because of the emptiness inside. “Give me a drink of water,” he said. He saw the woman had come with a leather bucket and a rope and he had neither. Yet he was wearied and tired. The woman said, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask me a Samaritan for a drink?” Then the gospel writer makes this comment, “For the Jews had nothing to do with Samaritans.”

Notice how Jesus breaks not only the sound barrier—but the nationalistic barrier and the sexist barrier as well. Did you know that the rabbis at this time had a saying, “Let no man speak to a woman in public. No, not even his wife.” Yet Jesus says, “Give me a drink.” And the woman responds, feeling the intensity of the years of rejection. “Why do you ask me, a Samaritan? You’re a Jew.” Can you feel the hatred in that statement?

Then Jesus said, “If you knew the gift of God and who it was that was talking to you, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. I’ll give you living water.” Jesus continued, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I give them will never be thirsty. The water that I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” The woman said, “Give me this water, so I don’t have to come here anymore and I’ll never be thirsty again.”

Jesus looked at her. Jesus was never willing to satisfy a surface need that was prompted by an inner need, and so he said, “Go call



Jesus’s Life is High Touch

Luke 8:42-48

Rev. Patricia Campbell-Schmitt

For the next three weeks we are going to be talking about the idea of encountering Jesus. The New Testament is full of stories of people who encountered Jesus—who had not just a casual meeting with him, but an encounter in which they suddenly realized who he was, and that somehow all of their hopes and fears were bound up in their response to this one man. An encounter in which they themselves are forever changed. We are going to look at three of these people and how they encountered Jesus. My hope is that we will not just learn about them but in the process we will have our own life-transforming encounters with Jesus.

When I was growing up the most dreaded disease in my world was not measles or mumps or chicken pox. It was a more subtle and mysterious disorder. There was no vaccine for it—no antidote or known cure and it was highly contagious. Nobody ever explained what would happen to you if you contracted this disease, but the mere mention of this particular disease was enough to strike terror in me and my friends. It was a fate worse than death. The only way to be safe was to make sure that any carriers of this disease were strictly quarantined and that you had no contact with them at all. Fortunately this disease was easy to recognize. It was a disease carried by boys. And every boy except my father was loaded with it. The name of this disease was...Cooties, the dreaded cootie disease. All a carrier had to do was to touch you, or breathe on you, or look at you real hard and you would be infected. Nobody was crazy enough to touch someone with cooties. It was like every carrier wore a big sign that said, “Don’t touch!” They were the untouchables.

Adults have cooties too. In fact, we live in a world in which there are many untouchables. Every society has certain people who are considered untouchable in that society. People who because of their race, or their socioeconomic status, or their language or their education or their physical appearance, or their health, are at the lowest rung of the ladder. The truth is that all of us, at certain times in our lives or in certain situations, all of us know what it feels like to be untouchable, unacceptable, unworthy outsiders.

Now this story is about how Jesus feels about the untouchables. The woman in the story we have just read was an untouchable. She

had a cancerous sore that had been bleeding for 12 years. She had depleted all of her money, seeking a cure but, worse than that, according to the book of Leviticus, she was a rejected outcast. She couldn't worship in the synagogue or enter the temple. Her family would have to reject her, her husband divorce her, and no one could touch her. Can you imagine what it would be like to live twelve years with no one ever touching you? The Hebraic law of the time said that anyone whom she touched, or anyone who touched her, was ceremonially unclean and could not even worship.

So can you imagine what it must have been like for this woman? Imagine for a moment the thought of never being touched again—never to feel the hug of a little child, or to feel a friend reach out for your hand, or to have a parent put an arm around you, never again to know the embrace of your spouse. The law was very clear: "Don't touch." We can imagine her thoughts as she went through those long, excruciating years. She had come to the place of hopelessness. "I'm an outcast. No one loves me. No one can touch me. No one cares, not even God."

And then strangely and mysteriously her conversation with herself was interrupted by a great truth that she had to deal with. At the lowest ebb of her discouragement a liberating thought arose. She had heard about one called Jesus of Nazareth. She had heard about what he had done for people in need. The thing that moved her deeply was the fact that Jesus had actually touched a leper, meaning that he took the leprosy and the uncleanness onto himself. Wherever he went he was moved to go to people in need, particularly people others had rejected.

Now her conversation changed. "Could it happen to me? Would he care for me?" Suddenly words began to grow inside of her that she repeated over and over again. "Oh, if I could only see him, just look at him, then I could decide whether it was true or not." When she learned that Jesus would soon be arriving in her town, in Capernaum, her dialogue continued. "I could see him. But it wouldn't make any difference. He wouldn't heal me. But if I could just have a look." When Jesus arrived in Capernaum, I imagine that this woman was on the edge of the crowd, watching. Certainly his eyes danced with joy and his whole countenance reflected compassionate love.

Then suddenly something leaped inside of her. Her dialogue with herself was radically changed as a new thought emerged. Not just "if

But there is also a price that we pay for this privacy, locking our memories, our feelings inside of ourselves can have some bad implications, for it can cut us off from potential support and feedback and we must bear our pain alone.

As the years go by we hide away inside of us the things that happen—the things that we feel. Suddenly our inner life becomes a snake pit, and in that snake pit are intertwined all the fantasies, the fears and the uncertainties—the hurts, the rebuffs—all the things that were said to us and that we said that we should never have said. Do you remember? Do you know how it feels? I do.

But, if we desire to share what's going on inside of us, who is going to listen and who can be trusted? We've all had enough experiences of a person saying, "Oh, I would have never have thought that of you." Suddenly we are locked up behind the moat bridge again. We let it down. We told somebody about our inner self, they traversed it, and took over the castle—with criticism and judgment. Or we overheard someone speak about someone else. George Meredith's definition of gossip is a good one. "Gossip is the only beast of prey that devours its victim before it dies." After you've heard some gossip about someone else, you say to yourself, "If they are going to talk that way about me, I will not let anyone know who I am."

Remember when you made that childhood decision? You know what? What we do to others, we do to God. It isn't long before we live in two worlds—the world within—the private world and the world without. Someone once said, "We do have two worlds, the outer world and the inner world. And between these two worlds the hardest world to conquer is the world within."

That was the problem with the woman who went to draw water at Jacob's well. She had two worlds—the hidden world of a string of broken relationships and the outer world that she projected to the village people. Isn't it strange that she came to draw water at high noon? Women drew water in the morning or in the evening. Could it be that her own sense of failure had become so self incriminating that she couldn't believe that anyone would want to go and draw water with her?

And isn't it amazing that near Jacob's well, near the fork of the road there in Samaria—where she could look up and see Mt. Garrison—the place where the Samaritans worshiped God, that something happened. Unfortunately, there was very little relationship



Someone Knows and Understands

John 4:1-26

Rev. Patricia Campbell-Schmitt

Do you ever remember playing that old game, "I'll give you a penny for your thoughts?" I do. Have you ever become suddenly and painfully aware that you don't know what is going on inside someone you love? It's almost as if a fog has settled down over that person, and you don't quite know what he or she is feeling, wondering or hoping. There are times when I'd give a lot more than a penny for some people's thoughts.

Inside of the inner heart of all of us, in the quiet harbor of our own thoughts, the warning flags are up. They tell us that there is a troubled sea out there—filled with the tumult of the great highways of human relationships. And we've all had enough near wrecks in our lives to not venture out of that harbor very much.

Most of us learn very early in childhood how to live inside and not to reveal on the outside what's going on inside of us. I once had an interesting experience on a lake beach in Wisconsin. I was watching this little girl build these wonderful sand castles. She'd run down to the water, fill her bucket and run back, and then she'd pack the water into the sand and make these amazing structures. She was singing and humming and playing, having a wonderful time. Her mother was watching all of this and before long she went over to the little girl and asked, "What are you making?" Her tone was overbearing, domineering and condescending. The little girl looked up, stopped humming and said, "I'm not going to tell you!" Then the mother, down on her knees in the sand, shaking her finger in the little girl's face said, "You must always tell mommy everything." The little girl stood up, dusted the sand off her hands and said, "Do I have to tell you everything? Won't there ever be a time when I don't have to tell you? Will I always have to tell everybody everything?"

Remember when you first discovered that you could control your environment and your relationships by what you kept inside, through that inner world of your own thought and feeling. There is a sense of separateness and individuality and power that comes to us as children, when we know something about ourselves that our parents don't know and when we decide not to tell them.

I could only see him," but "if I could only touch him." Then she saw at the hem of his outer garment, a tassel—representing God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and of God's power to deliver people in each day. The woman kept her eye on that. That hope and faith inside of her was multiplied even greater until she couldn't contain it. Only one thought occupied her mind—"If I can only touch him. If I can only touch him."

Her uncleanness worked for her and not against her. As she moved through the crowd, suddenly people realized that an unclean woman was coming and they stepped aside to let her through. They didn't want her to touch them nor did they want any part of themselves to touch her. She moved intentionally and deliberately through the crowd. "If I can only touch him." Then she was there, close enough, and with a hand of faith she reached out and grasped that tassel and let go. And in that moment, power surged through her body. It was a spine tingling, hemorrhage drying, cell healing experience.

Now this woman thought to herself: "I must get out of here. I've broken the law. I don't want to be exposed. I have got to get away." So she made her way back to the edge of the crowd, and I believe Jesus' eyes met the woman's eyes and she knew that he knew. So she comes back through the crowd and falls down at Jesus' feet. What would Jesus do? How is he going to handle this? The law is very clear. The law says, "Don't touch! Isolate yourself from the unclean like this woman, from lepers, from Gentiles, from tax collectors, from the uncircumcised. Or their uncleanness, their sin, may rub off on you." There were serious penalties for the unclean who touched another. This was the strategy of isolation.

But Jesus looks down at this woman and I can imagine that he reaches out to touch her as he says these great words: "Daughter, be of good cheer, your faith has made you well. Go in peace." There is no word about her breaking the law and touching him. No, in this instance and in so many others as Jesus touches the lepers, and eats with tax collectors and Gentiles and women, Jesus demonstrates that God has forever rejected the strategy of isolation; the attempt to quarantine ourselves from others.

Besides the incredible miracle of the healing of this woman there are a couple other miracles in this story that I want to lift up this morning. The first miracle is that Jesus is eminently approachable. He is the most approachable person there ever was. This is a miracle

because Jesus was considered a Rabbi, a teacher, and a Rabbi's job is to make sure that the law is understood and followed. It was the job of the unclean woman to avoid all people, especially Rabbis. A Rabbi is the last person an unclean woman would ever want to see, because the woman would know that she could get stoned for breaking the law and coming too close to a Rabbi. Rabbis in Jesus' day prided themselves on being unapproachable. They thought of themselves as being so close to God that common sinners, lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors and Gentiles should not be allowed to get too close to them.

But here is the great difference between Jesus and the Rabbis. Jesus is spectacularly approachable. This is one of the fundamental ways of distinguishing between Jesus' way of life, the way of life to which you and I are called, and that of these religious leaders. For them the more spiritual they became the less approachable they were. For Jesus it is just the opposite. True spirituality makes you more approachable, not less approachable. Jesus came in part to reveal, to show that God is high touch. God, who people thought was so unapproachable, so far off is high touch.

This is really at the heart of where we are as a church. We very much want to create a place here where people feel the freedom to approach God. And one of the questions I want each of us to reflect on is, "Am I becoming more approachable or less approachable?" Jesus had the kind of profound different-ness that drew sinners to him. While the rabbis had the kind of superficial different-ness that pushed people away. Jesus is the most approachable person in the universe. He is just waiting for people, for you and I, to approach him and that is the first miracle in this story. Whatever you have done, whoever you are, you can approach Jesus and he cares for you.

The second miracle is the miracle of the touch. Get this. The unclean woman touched Jesus when she was unclean and the law is very clear. The law says "Don't touch." Certainly Jesus could have healed this woman without having her touch him, just like he could have healed the lepers without touching them. But Jesus lets this woman touch him, and he touches the lepers while they are still unclean. This is a great miracle. This is Jesus breaking the law for the sake of healing others. Jesus didn't need to touch the lepers or the sinners or the tax collectors or let this woman touch him. Here Jesus is making a statement to the woman. You see, the significance of this

As we come to the end of this story we hear Jesus ask the man, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" And the blind man answered, '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.' And the man said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshiped him."

Now this man has received not one, but two wonderful gifts from Jesus. First he received his physical sight, now he receives his spiritual sight. He recognizes Jesus as the Son of God and his Savior and Lord. And Jesus says to him, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may gain their sight, and those who do not see may become blind."

Two questions as you continue your Lenten journey toward the cross and the empty tomb: Am I paying attention to God? Am I paying attention to other people?

Closing Prayer: God, thank you so much that although all of us have this kind of blindness, Jesus has such great compassion on us. Thank you so much, God, that in our sinfulness and blindness you pay attention to us. And you long for us to speak to you about any parts of our lives. Help us, God, to pay attention to you; to listen to your Spirit. And help us to pay attention to people—often the outcasts—whom you love so much. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

did when he took some saliva and dirt to make clay to put on the man's eyes,

More than that, Jesus had violated another Sabbath rule. You could receive medical attention on the Sabbath only if your life was in danger. But the life of the blind man was not in danger, just his sight. So when Jesus healed him, he violated another rule. This was all taken very seriously.

So here is what I think Jesus means by "the work of God." It is not primarily about rules. It's primarily about people. He is saying, "If you want to do the work of God you've got to love people." You see, God's work is primarily about love. The place where love starts is in paying attention.

Scott Peck wrote this about love, "Love is a form of work. The principle form of work that love takes is attention. When we love another person we give them our attention. We attend to that person's growth. The energy required, the discipline of focusing total attention, is so great that it can be accomplished only by love."

So I want to leave you with two questions to ponder in the week ahead. First, ask yourself: *How am I paying attention to God?* Am I listening for the still, small voice in which God usually speaks? Am I stopping long enough during my day to take notice? Second, ask yourself the question: *Am I paying attention to people?* If you want to do the work of God, start by simply paying attention to people—especially those nobody else seems to notice. That's what Jesus did to the blind man, because in seeing him he loved him.

One of the things I love about Patty is how she pays attention to other people. As a pastor she pays careful attention to shut ins, the sick, people who are grieving, people who are hurting. As a mother, she pays attention to our children. They are constantly on her mind and in her heart; she is always attend to their interests and needs. She and Jesus are my role models. I have a lot to learn from them both.

You see, Jesus paid attention to the marginalized. He understood the words of the Prophet Isaiah. Words that express God's great frustration at the refusal of religious people to pay attention to the things that really matter. "You that are deaf and you that are blind, look up and see. Who is blind or deaf but my servant? He sees many things but he does not observe them. His ears are open but he does not hear. Who among you will give heed to this?" (Isaiah 42:18-22)

miracle of touch is that Jesus is willing to take another person's suffering and sin onto himself in order to bring about healing. He didn't have to do that. This is precisely the same dynamic as what happened on the cross—when Jesus took on our sin, our death, so that we could take on his life. By his stripes we are healed.

Jesus didn't call for his followers, his church, to be a quarantine zone, a kind of a germ-free zone. We are not called to avoid infection by avoiding the infected. We are called to reach out and to take others to Christ. To consider our lives a success if we avoid sickness and suffering is to make a mockery of the cross, and it is to abandon the people God has given us to care for. You see, everyday you and I pass by and rub shoulders with people of immeasurable worth that God has made, and on each one of them is a sign that says, "Please touch me." But we are afraid or shy or busy. We don't want to get broken and we don't want to share in the brokenness of others. But it is only when lepers and unclean people get touched do they get healed. Jesus touches them and he asks us to do the same.

Clergy friends of mine who have worked with AIDS patients, especially in the early years, when there was so much fear associated with this disease, tell of the importance of touch in the emotional and spiritual healing of those with AIDS. It has broken my heart to hear the terrible stories of isolation and rejection that so many persons with AIDS have experienced—even from their own family members.

Today we commission our 2006 Mission Team to Mexico. As you work among the people of Tijuana you will touch the lives of the homeless, poor of that country...the ignored, forgotten people of this world, that many would like to believe do not exist. As you reach out to touch them with the love of Christ, allow them to touch you with God's love as well. Care for them as you would care for Jesus himself, and as you do you will receive one of the greatest blessings in your life.

The secret to spiritual life is not to isolate yourself away from sin and suffering. It is not possible even if you wanted to do it. Jesus lived in the same contaminated environment as all the rest of us. But he was immune to the sin. The secret is to be so filled with the life of Jesus, to be so filled with the spirit of God that when you touch the world it doesn't infect you, you infect it with God's love.

Who are the untouchable people in your world? Someone who is suffering, a neighbor, someone you work with, it might be a person who is difficult to love. Christ longs to stretch out his hand, to break

through the isolation, and to touch the untouchable part of your life, so that you can infect this world with his love. Will you allow this high touch Christ to touch you today? You'll never be the same again.

spectacular corners of your life, "As you walk along." It happens with the people you meet and the opportunities God brings into your daily existence.

God will not ask you one day, "Did you achieve financial success? Did you live in the right neighborhood? Did you graduate from the right school? Did you get promoted?" God will ask you, "Did you do my work?" In your job, in your neighborhood, with your family or your friends—did you love people, did you extend my kingdom into where you live? Did you do so "while it is day, as you walk along?"

There have been other days. There was a day back in 1954 when some folks decided they would build a church on the corner of Dosch and Sunset. We who are here today owe them a great deal for their commitment and vision. There have been other people who have come before you—your parents, your grandparents, who have also given a lot to make your life what it is today. If you are faithful, people will come after you and they will benefit from your faithfulness and commitment. But this is *your* day. And if the light of God is going to shine in this corner of the world, in the little space where you're sitting right now, it's going to have to be through you. So don't miss it because if you do, you won't get it back. Jesus says, "Night is coming when no one can work." This is the day. You are on a mission from God.

Now before I close let me go back to the other part of Jesus' statement "we must do the work of God while it is day." Let me ask, "*Just what is the work of God?*" There was great disagreement between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day on what constitutes the work of God. Look with me at verses 14 through 16. This blind man is brought before the Pharisees. And we read "Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. When the Pharisees also began to ask how he had received his sight the blind man 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.'"

Apparently in giving the blind man his sight, Jesus had broken several laws about keeping the Sabbath. The religious leaders had a list of things you were not supposed to do on that day. For example, you were not allowed to cut your fingernails, or pluck a lock of hair from your head or shave your beard. You couldn't do any mixing or kneading, like making bread or mixing clay, which was what Jesus

both bumbling musicians who get out of jail and go visit someone they call “The Penguin.”

She’s actually a Catholic sister who wears a nun’s habit; that’s why they call her the Penguin. She heads up an orphanage. She tells them the city is going to tear the orphanage down unless she can come up with \$50,000 and deliver it in just eleven days to the tax assessor’s office. So the Blues Brothers decide to take up her cause. Throughout the movie when people ask them what they’re doing they have a stock answer. Do you know what they say? “We’re on a mission from God!” And, of course, it’s hilarious to think that these two, ordinary, bumbling idiots could have a commission from God to do anything. That’s just the point of the joke.

You see, everything in our world is designed to keep us from believing that we are on a mission from God. If you don’t believe me, the next time you get stopped by a police officer who asks you why you’re going so fast, tell the officer, “I’m on a mission from God,” and see how far it gets you. It sounds a little grandiose to say, “I’m on a mission from God,” doesn’t it? But what’s the alternative? The alternative is that you’re *not* on a mission from God. It’s one or the other. The alternative is that God has no particular interest or investment or attention devoted to what your life is all about. But you see, the truth about your life, which only you can somehow come to believe, is that you are on a mission from God.

Jesus is very clear about this. He says in the Sermon on the Mount, “You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world; you are a city set on a hill.” Your life is a mission sent by God. You must come to believe this because it’s possible to miss it. Many people do. That’s why Jesus says “While it’s day.”

There’s another thing about this story that I hope you will notice. Remember way back at the beginning of the story where John says, “As Jesus walked along.” Jesus was just traveling along, going about his day.

So let me ask you this question: What is the main place you will carry out God’s mission in the world?” Answer: “As you walk along.” It doesn’t have to be in high profile, important positions. In fact, one of the great barriers to experiencing our lives as a mission from God is the illusion that we must somehow have to have an important job to qualify. We need an impressive title behind our name. You see, mostly this business of doing the work of God happens in the routine, un-



Jesus Pays Attention to the Ignored

Isaiah 42:18-20; John 9:1-11

Rev. Tom Campbell-Schmitt

The story we’re going to look at today is about Jesus noticing somebody that other people didn’t notice. Here’s is a common scene: a couple is sitting at the breakfast table and she’s pouring her heart out in the conversation and he’s reading the newspaper. She gets more and more frustrated until finally she can’t stand it any more. She says to him, “You’re not listening to me!” He says to her, “I can repeat every word you said.” And he does. Now, here is the question. He is able to repeat every word she said to him, but is she satisfied with that? No, she’s not satisfied. Why not? Because she doesn’t want him just to get the words. She’s not interested in conversing with a tape recorder. She wants him to put down the stupid paper, look her in the eye, and pay attention to her. Am I right? It could go the other way. It could be the woman who’s reading the paper and the man that’s trying to have a conversation.

Paying attention is one of the most powerful forces in the world. They have done studies on this. In one of the studies a teacher was working with a class and he had the students in the class hone in on this particular experiment. The way it went was when he was speaking, if he moved to the right side of the room, they wouldn’t pay any attention to him at all. They wouldn’t look at him. No eye contact. As he moved over to the left they would sit up straight. The farther he moved to the left the more attention they would pay. So that if he was way over to the wall they’d be taking notes and smiling and nodding. By the end of the quarter this teacher was standing in the left corner of the room the whole time.

Paying attention to people shapes their behavior, it shapes their lives. It is a very powerful force. Any of you who have spoken in a public setting know how powerful attention is. When you speak there are certain faces that encourage you. I find this to be true when I’m speaking as well. Some of you by just paying attention to me, making eye contact, can feed me. There are certain faces that I just look for, because by the way you look, smile or nod, you’re saying, “I’m with you, I’m tuning in to what you’re saying.”

Now quite frankly there are other faces that are better not to look at. One of the first times I ever preached somebody fell asleep. It was a devastating experience. I can still remember riding home afterward

with Patty. I said, “Patty, next Saturday night would you mind getting to bed a little earlier!?”

You see, attention is so valuable—we don’t just give it—what do we do? We *pay* it. Like money, it’s a valuable thing. That brings us to the story in John’s gospel of Jesus and blind man. This man spent his entire life being ignored. He was simply not worth noticing. He was blind from birth. He was a beggar. When you are out driving and you come to a freeway off ramp and you see a person standing there with a sign that says, “Will work for food,” watch what happens to the faces of the people in the cars next to you, because you will commonly see the same kind of interaction. The beggar will try to catch people’s eyes and they will avert their eyes. They will try to pretend like they don’t see him, because once they make eye contact then they have to respond.

Well, that was this man’s life. He would try to do something to get people’s attention and they would look the other way. This man was used to being ignored. So notice what John 9, verse one says: “As Jesus walked along he *saw* a man...” You might want to underline or circle that word *saw* every time it appears because all through this chapter it keeps popping up.

John tells the story with great skill. He compares physical sight with spiritual sight or insight. He contrasts the ability to see spiritually with spiritual blindness; with people who think they can see, but in fact can’t really see at all. The encounter starts with Jesus paying attention to someone everybody else ignores. He *pays attention an insignificant looking person; someone like* you and me. Did you know Jesus pays attention to you? There is not the smallest detail of your life that is not of immense interest to Jesus. Jesus notices you. You may be boring to a lot of people, but you know what? You are never boring to God. God is not bored by the most trivial detail of your life. God pays immense attention to you.

Jesus sees this man, he notices him. Consequently the disciples notice him as well. Then they ask Jesus a very odd question: “Rabbi, who sinned? This man or his parents that he was born blind.” Now if you reflect on it, this was a very strange question. The man was born blind, so how could his blindness that existed since his birth have been caused by his own sin? Well, there was a belief in Jesus’ day that it was possible to be born sinful.

If a mother-to-be, for example, worshipped in a heathen temple, there were Rabbis who taught that the unborn child was judged to be guilty of idolatry. They believed it was possible for a fetus to sin. Generally, in those days people thought that there was a cause and effect relationship between suffering and sin. The blind man, you see, had a triple curse on him. First, he was blind and that was *depressing* to people. He was a beggar and that was *demanding* of people. In their mind he was the product of sin, and that was *disgusting* to people. Some mothers would walk by this person and they would teach their children: don’t look at him, don’t listen to him, don’t pay any attention to him. He wants something and he doesn’t deserve it.

The disciples said, “Who sinned?” And in verses 3 through 5 Jesus answered their question. “Who sinned? Neither this man nor his parents sinned. He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” Then he goes on to say, “We must do work the work of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.” Let’s take a closer look at this peculiar response. What does Jesus mean when he says “while it’s day?” I wonder if he’s saying that regardless of who we are, regardless of whether we can or can’t see, whether we have a lot or a little, we all have a limited amount of time. Like this day. In about eight hours the sun will set and the day will be over. There is time for us to do many extraordinary things, but night is coming; this day will not last forever. It’s possible to miss it.

Remarkable opportunities are often that way. You only have one brief opportunity for these special deals. When they’re gone, they’re gone. They don’t come back. So Jesus says “we must do the works of God while it is day.” Certainly we understand that was his mission. But did you notice his word choice? Did he say, “I must do the works of God.” No. What does he say? “We must do God’s work.” Who is he talking about? His disciples? Yes, but by extension he’s including all of his followers. He’s including you and me. If you really want to get it, just insert your name in there. “You, (Tom) must work the works of God.” I think one of the hardest things for human beings to realize is we were actually created to do the works of God. That’s our purpose for being. My guess is one of the hardest things for you to believe is that God really created you and sent you to this earth to do God’s work.

There is a movie that came out some time ago called the *Blues Brothers*. There are two central characters in this film. Two brothers,