Gratitude Sunday - FBCD - 2017 - Rev. Jeremy Hall

“God Made Dirt” - John 9 - Fresh Start Service - 8:45 am

Good morning,

Let’s take a look at this text from the 9th chapter of John.

As we have talked about several times during this sermon series, the author of *John* is a storyteller - or as Pastor David put it, a “narrative commentator.” He crafts his narratives internationally. This person is trying to tell us a story about who Jesus is, as much as they are telling us facts about Jesus’ life.

This is a different sort of Gospel from the other 3...

The book opens with a theological poem about the divine nature of Jesus, the plot flows in a different order than in the other gospels, holds different stories, it contains intentional groupings like the seven “I am” statements of Jesus and the 7 miracles of Jesus. This writer wants you to see what he is doing! The author of *John* wants you to notice, wants you to catch on, wants you to pick up on the big God themes woven into these stories.

So here, in chapter 9, we pick up one of these threads from the past chapter. (That Pastor David so wonderfully spoke about last week) Jesus and the pharisees were fighting at the temple; bickering about history, authority, and calling each other the devil. It is during this fight that Jesus brings up words like “sight” and “witness” - “light” and “darkness” and drops the mic with one of John’s 7 “I AM” statements. The passage concludes -

**58** “Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” **59** At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

But, remember, we added the verses and the chapter breaks to the story… so maybe the story doesn't end there. Chapter 9 opens - “and as he went along he saw a man who had been blind from birth.”

If you put these two together they flow perfectly… “They picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. And as he went along he saw a man who had been blind from birth.

The same themes continue… Jesus, who was just talking about darkness and light, and claimed the divine title of “I AM” now sees a blind man on the street, starts talking about working in the light, refers to himself as the light, and engages in the distinctly messianic act of restoring sight to the blind.

I think the author wants us to see this healing as a credentialing act for the claims that went before it.

-Jesus’ answer to the question “why was this man born blind?” may seem unsatisfactory to us in a human sense, --- “so that God may be glorified in him” ---but as a literary device for the author THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT HE IS!

Jesus has claimed divine status, declared himself to be messiah, called himself the light of the world and to back it all up, he miraculously gives sight to a blind man.

Notice where this happens too, a public place (a plot point later in the story) so that everyone knows what has happened… everyone except those religious elites who were fighting with Jesus, everyone - even the blind man - sees, everyone except the pharisees; these people who Jesus calls blind. - you gotta love that irony!

So Jesus, not really asking for permission, Hawks one into to dirt, makes spit mud, and rubs it on the dude’s eyes. Then sends him to wash his face… after which the blind man can see for the first time.

Pretty cool miracle, and if you like miracles, you will like *John*. in my bible *John* is ~20 pages long, and in that brief 20 pages we get seven miracles.

* In John 2, Jesus keeps the party going, turning water into wine only by willing it to be so… no incantation, no prayer, he doesn't touch it, he doesn't tell it what to do… it just happens
* In John 4 Jesus heals a Roman officer’s son at a distance. He doesn't go to see him, he doesn't give the officer any instructions, he simply tells him that the boy has been made well… and he is
* In John 5 Jesus heals the lame man laying by the pool, commanding him to “take us his mat and walk”
* In John 6 Jesus feeds the 5,000 with limited supplies… and once again, he doesn't do anything to the food - reality just shifts around him and there is enough for everyone.
* Again in chapter 6 we see Jesus walking on water, defying the laws of nature as if they are nothing…
* And in John 11, Jesus calls lazarus back from the dead with two simple words!

But the healing here in John 9 is strikingly different.

Do you see it?

The whole mud thing, it's different, it's strange, it doesn't keep with the pattern.

In *John,* Jesus has never needed anything to accomplish his miracles.

Nor will use need such assistance again.

In this story, Jesus is argues his divinity, reveals his status as messiah, declares himself to be the light of the world, and to put a bow on it heals a man born blind.

And to accomplish this… no mighty payers, eloquent words, ancient hymns, not a dramatic gesture, or a thundering command, no clouds or lighting, no calling down angels, dirt.

Just Dirt.

dirt, spit, and some water.

In this miracle specifically, Jesus uses unnecessary materials to accomplish his purposes.

And while this is an odd move in the book of *John,*  it is not out of character for the God of the Bible.

Let’s take a look at some history together!

1 Chronicles 1 “Adam, Seth, Enosh, **2** Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, **3** Enoch, Methuselah,Lamech, Noah.

**4** The sons of Noah:[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Chronicles+1&version=NIV#fen-NIV-10257a)]

Shem, Ham and Japheth.

#### **The Japhethites**

**5** The sons[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Chronicles+1&version=NIV#fen-NIV-10258b)] of Japheth:

Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshek and Tiras.

**6** The sons of Gomer:

Ashkenaz, Riphath[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Chronicles+1&version=NIV#fen-NIV-10259c)] and Togarmah.

**7** The sons of Javan:

Elishah, Tarshish, the Kittites and the Rodanites.”

...And it goes on like this for 9 chapters…

From adam to ~the year 900 BCE.

These kinds of biblical texts often trip up readers today. They break the our momentum, and turn off those who need a narrative to follow… or an encouraging verse to post to twitter. This passage is basicly just names. For 9 whole chapters, names!

But the author who put this enormous genealogy together is trying to tell a story.

The author has strung together the long history of the people of God in such a way that you can almost take it all in at once! The author wants the readers to remember what God had done so far in their story, and that they were instruments in it. The names like “Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim” are the author saying “remember, remember remember”

“Zimri, Ethan, Heman,”

“remember, remember remember”

“David, Joseph, Caleb,”

“remember, remember remember”

“Jacob, Isaac, Abraham”

“remember, remember remember”

“remember, remember remember”

Remember what God has done for us!

Remember how God was with us through the hard times!

Remember that God is the source of our good times!

Remember how God chose people like us to do amazing things!

“remember, remember remember”

This is a classic Old Testament theme.

The word Remember occurs ~137times in the old testament. (give or take based on who is doing the translation work) - and these 9 chapters are participating in that tradition.

“remember, remember remember”

From the sons of David, all the way back to Adam.

And this is where things get really fun!

-The Hebrew word for adam is *Adam…* yeah that’s right, i went to seminary!

-But there is another word I want to show you… *Adamah*, the Hebrew word for “DIRT.”

They are basicly the same word, if we wanted, we could translate Adam’s name as “dirtman.”

From the very start God has been making miracles out of dirt, and the author of 1 Chronicles wants you to see this. God has been using us, flawed, broken, shortsighted, dirt-people to do amazing things in the world.

In the same way, the story of FBCD is a story of God doing amazing things with ordinary people.

Like in 1862, while the nation was in the midst of civil war, some christians in georgia and kentucky decided decatur needed a church, and raised $600 to build a small brick building.

This church outgrew its space and in 1926 built a new building near twain’s tavern just up the street.

Again, in a time of war, in 1944 weeks after the bombing of pearl harbor Pastor Dick Hall had a vision of a church in this location, a church that would change the world.

This vision became a reality, we bought the land and began to build. We also sent missionaries all over the world!

Nyasaland, mexico, guatemala, switzerland, kenya, taiwan, korea, italy, japan, nigeria, china, the philippines, chile, brazil and more!

Rev. Lancaster would focus that vision in on the city of Decatur, and we would become “the front porch of decatur” for the first time. A building full of life, a community being blessed by its neighbors. This is also when we committed the scandalous act of ordaining our first female deacons to ministry at FBCD.

Later our pastor and friend Peter Rhea Jones would lead us to take the brave difficult steps away from the SBC in the 90’s to join God in doing something new, when it would have been much easier to stay.

Rev. Parker made worship spaces like this one a reality, and in 2004 we ordained our first gay decon.

And in 2007 we called Rev. Julie Pennington Russell as our first Female Senior Pastor.

But this is not just a story of pastors. Ours is the story of deacons, sunday school teachers, staff, ministers, missionaries, families, and friends.

We have planted churches,

Sponsored seminaries,

Assisted refugees,

As a church our name is on a 1957 statement on civil rights and a 2017 statement condemning white supremacy.

We weekly offer various forms of ministry, relief, and assistance to our community as well as being a gathering place for Decatur.

God has done amazing things here.

God is doing amazing things here.

God will do amazing things here.

In us, through us, for us, and with us…

“remember, remember remember”

The people, the work, the struggles,

“remember, remember remember”

The victories, the ministry, the missions

“remember, remember remember”

Church, we are currently in a season of transition, it has been a long season, a hard season of transition. But here we are, ministering, working, worshiping. A family of “dirt-people” changing the world.

We do not know what the future hold for this church, but we can see what God has done, we know how God likes to work, and we know that God uses unnecessary materials like us to accomplish amazing things for the Kingdom.

This is not the time to hold back,

This is not the time to retreat,

This is not the time to be worried,

Rather, be Grateful!

Grateful for what God has done, is doing, and will do!

This is a time for courageous gratitude.

Our best days are not behind us.

And while our future will most likely not look like our past, it will look like the Kingdom.

We may just be a gathering of “dirt-people” but sometimes when you get enough dirt together it can become a garden.

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Think back to the reading from John, What was the man’s response to Jesus’ working in his life? His gratitude made him bold. Bold in his witness and Bold in his worship. Jesus chooses to use dirt to heal the man not because he has to, but because, for some reason or another, he wants to. Jesus chooses to invite us into his dream of cosmic reconciliation not because he needs us, but because he wants us.

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Maybe you are here today and the title of “dirt” feels like it fits you perfectly,

Perhaps you have come to the conclusion that your “dirt” status is the only thing that defines you, that dirt is the final word on your life. Your identity, your purpose, and your destiny…

But we are here today to tell you that God made dirt, that the whole story of humanity begins with dirt, and that Jesus can use dirt to do beautiful things in the world.

And that is something to really be grateful for.