

The city of Jerusalem was alive with excitement.  
It was the Feast of Booths,  
a time of religious worship and joyful feasting,  
a week-long Thanksgiving day.

Even Jonas, the beggar who sat by the temple gate, was affected.  
His blind eyes had never seen the sights of the feast, but others had described them,  
so his sensitive hearing and a good imagination enabled him to picture what was going on.  
Besides, this was a good time for begging.  
People gave alms joyfully, and Jonas had done well.  
Today was the Sabbath day, the great day of the feast,  
and Jonas expected to harvest a bonus crop of shekels.

He heard the footsteps of a group of men.  
He was ready to call out, asking for alms, when a rough Galilean voice asked,  
"Rabbi, whose sin caused him to be born blind--his own or his parents?"  
Jonas had heard that question before, and it always hurt.  
Wasn't it bad enough to be blind without having people suggest that it might be his own fault?  
He was ready to protest, when another man spoke.  
His accent was also Galilean, but his voice had a wonderful tenderness.  
"His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parents sins.  
He is blind so that God's power may be seen in him."  
Now there was a new idea! His blindness could glorify God! How could that be?  
Then Jonas heard approaching footsteps.  
The squeak of a sandal and the rustle of a robe told him someone was kneeling by him.  
He heard a man spit, and then he felt gentle fingers rubbing wet clay on his eyes.  
The man stood up. "Go and wash your face in the pool of Siloam," he said, and then walked on.

Jonas sat there. What a strange incident. What should he do?  
The clay was drying; he could brush it off easily.  
But that voice had a touch of authority.  
And Jonas remembered the story of Namaan the Syrian leper,  
who almost refused to obey Elisha's instructions to bathe in the Jordan river,  
but who finally obeyed and was healed.  
So he emptied the coins from his beggar's bowl into his bag,  
took his stick, and tapped his way slowly through the crowded streets to the pool of Siloam.  
When Jonas got to the pool, he knelt on the edge, put his hands in the water, and washed his face.  
And when he did, he **saw**... for the first time.

Can you imagine how Jonas felt? He could see!  
The water of the pool, the cobblestones of the street, the people around him--he could see them!  
He drank it all in like a thirsty man who has found a pool of clear, cold water!

Then he began to walk away.

At first he shuffled and tapped with his stick, as he always had.

But then, with a laugh, he threw the stick away, stood tall, and walked homeward.

He got to the street where he lived, and strode up the hill to his home.

He greeted the people he passed, and received blank looks! They didn't recognize him!

He had a hard time convincing people that he was really Jonas, the blind beggar.

He had to tell his story over and over.

But in a short time the news was spreading like wildfire: Jonas can see!

What had happened was amazing .and had to be investigated.

So Jonas was marched off to tell his story to the Pharisees.

Jonas told them what had happened;

in fact, he had to tell parts of it several times.

Then the Pharisees turned their backs on him and started talking to each other.

They didn't intend him to hear their discussion,

but his sensitive ears picked up much of what they said.

"This man isn't from God, or he wouldn't do such things on the Sabbath."

"Well, then, where does he get the power to heal a blind man?"

"I don't believe this man was really blind."

"But what about the witnesses?"

Finally Jonas heard them send someone to call his parents.

Can't you imagine how deeply this affected him?

When he was brought to the Pharisees, he was frightened.

But as he listened to the rabbis argue with one another,

and heard them deny what he knew was true, he got a bit upset.

When Jesus had spoken to him, Jonas had barely believed him.

He didn't really know Jesus; he had only heard people talk about him.

But after all that had happened to him,

Jonas was sure that Jesus was responsible for his healing,

and that Jesus had done it by the power of God.

So, when the Pharisees asked him,

he told them that he was sure that Jesus was a prophet from God.

When Jonas' parents arrived, he could see that they were scared.

They were afraid that the Sanhedrin would excommunicate them.

That meant they would not be able to worship in the temple or in their synagogue.

They would be ostracized, persecuted, and cut off from everything that was Jewish.

They were afraid of that, so they identified their son

and said that he had been blind from birth,

but insisted that they had no idea how he had been cured.

"He's old enough; ask him!"

So the Pharisees came back to Jonas:

"Before God, tell us the truth. We know this man is not a respectable Jew."

"I don't know about that. I only know that I was blind and now I can see!"

What do you say to an answer like that? The Pharisees stalled.

"Well, what did he do to you? How did he cure you?"

"Look, I've told you the story. Why do you want to hear it again?"

Do you want to become his disciples?"

That really upset the Pharisees.

"You are his disciple; we are Moses' disciples.

We know Moses' credentials, but we don't know anything about this Jesus."

"Isn't that strange? You don't know anything about this man, but he cured my blindness.

Now if God only listens to those who worship and obey God,

how could this Jesus heal me unless he was a servant of God?"

That did it! The Pharisees heaped curses and imprecations on the head of poor Jonas,  
and ended up by excommunicating him!

As Jonas walked the streets of Jerusalem, he was pretty depressed.

It had been bad enough being a blind beggar, but it would be worse being excommunicated.

How could something so wonderful turn out so badly?

A Galilean voice that Jonas would never forget cut through his misery. "Jonas."

Jonas turned and was face to face with Jesus.

"Jonas, are you willing to trust in the Servant of God?"

"Tell me who he is, sir, so I can trust in him!"

"It is I."

"I trust you, Lord." And Jonas knelt humbly before Jesus.

Then Jesus made a strange and wonderful statement:

"I came to this world to judge, so that the blind should see and those who see should become blind."

It makes you wonder, doesn't it...Who's really blind?

That saying explains the story, and the story illustrates the saying.

Jonas was certainly blind. He was not only physically blind, but he had nothing to offer Jesus.

The only thing Jonas had was a need.

But Jesus came into this world to meet the needs of people.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

He came that people might have abundant life.

Jesus came to Jonas with an offer of help which was also a demand for faith.

And Jonas trusted Jesus.

His faith was small and weak, but it was real; he did what Jesus told him to do.

That small faith led to his healing.

And his faith grew until it became a clear statement of his willingness

to worship and follow Jesus, the Christ of God.

The one who had been blind had his eyes opened so that he could see the glory of God.

The Pharisees could certainly see.  
They not only had physical sight,  
    but they were sure that they had religious and spiritual insight as well.  
They were the religious and theological leaders of the Jewish people,  
    students of the Bible, faithful observers of all the Jewish laws.  
They had so much that they saw no need for anything more.  
So when God sent Jesus into the world, they rejected him.  
    He did not fit into their system.  
        He did not agree with their theological doctrines.  
        He did not accept their authority.  
He kept doing things which broke down the walls  
    between respectable Jews and everyone else,  
    walls they had worked so hard to erect.  
So they rejected him, and finally crucified him.  
It has been said that there is no one so blind as the one who will not see.  
That was their problem;  
    confronted by the Light of the world they chose darkness rather than light.

Jesus has that divisive effect.  
When people learn about Jesus, they are either drawn to him or repelled by him.  
Because Jesus comes as the incarnation of God's love,  
    proclaiming and displaying the unconditional love of God  
    and offering God's love freely to all who will accept it,  
those who recognize their need for God's love are drawn to Jesus.  
But those who are sure that they can meet God on their own terms  
    reject a love that is freely offered to all;  
        In fact, they are offended by the thought of a love that is freely given.  
It hurts their pride to think that they might be no better than the average sinner.  
And so those who have nothing become God's friends and lovers,  
    and those who think they have everything reject the most important thing in life.

It makes us wonder...who is really blind?  
It makes us ask ourselves...do I really accept God's love  
    as something I cannot and need not earn,  
    or do I trust in my own goodness, or righteousness, or respectability  
The answer to that question tells us whether we see, or are really blind.  
And the answer to that question is vital  
    for this life and for the life to come.

To God, who gives light in the darkness, be praise and honour and glory, now and forever. Amen.