>> McKenzie Stribich: So I think we're ready to get started here. Jane?

>> Rev Jane Gould: Sure. I'm Reverend Jane Gould and on behalf of St. Luke's San Lucas Episcopal Church in Long Beach, California and RespectAbility, a national disability rights organization, I'd like to welcome everyone to our fifth and final session of Disability and the Bible. We have for the last four Wednesday nights and tonight, had the opportunity in a collaboration of organizations both near and dear to the heart of McKenzie Stribich, so she decided we all needed to meet each other. And it has resulted in one of those collaborations that before the pandemic we wouldn't have even known to be possible, and we now know that we can forge relationships and build communities online, and outside those we understand to be in our community already. So it's been a pretty glorious adventure for us. This evening's content leaders are going to be McKenzie herself, who will be taking the lead in teaching, and David Tabb Stewart, a professor of religious studies at California State University in Long Beach, a Hebrew Bible scholar and a disability rights activist and scholar, looking particularly at biblical texts and faith tradition and how those are gifts, burdens, and blessings, shall we say when it comes to disability. And so I hand it over to McKenzie and David, and just am really grateful to all of you who have been part of this collaborative adventure of RespectAbility and St. Luke's San Lucas.

>> McKenzie: Yeah. Thank you, Jane! A few cursory notes. I just want to say that I am co-host right now, and as co-host there's a lot of bells and dings and things, sounds going on. I also have ADHD which means I get really easily distracted amongst other things, so if I seem to get momentarily distracted it is probably one of those noises and I'll just deal with it and get back on track. But it's that squirrel meme -- that is me to a tee -- see a squirrel --and sometimes I literally see squirrels out my my window here at my desk. And let me tell you, my mind just completely leaves. So I also want to say -- so tonight --we've been working in the last few weeks from Hebrew scriptures. Tonight we're focusing on the Christian New Testament. And so I just want to give a big sort of blanket "According to the tradition from which I am speaking," because we have folks from different religions here, we have folks from different traditions within those religions, and so I just want to say, I am not the arbiter of truth. These are the things that I believe, these are the things that, you know, are according to my tradition. So the last thing I want to do is proselytize. [chuckles] That's not the goal here. I also want to acknowledge that there is a serious bit of anti-Semitism in the Gospel of John that for centuries and centuries has been extremely damaging to the Jewish community. I think that's something that Christians are starting to reconcile with, probably not quickly enough, but we're working on it. I also want to say there is a lot in this text and I am just going to gloss over most of it because I am not a Biblical scholar. I'm coming at this from the point of view of a disabled person, my lived experience. Most of this talk is going to come from the scholarship of the Reverend Dr. Jaime Clark-Soles, who, she has a great talk on YouTube from a session at The Institute of Theology and Disability. Shelly is — Shelly Christensen, who is my supervisor, is on the Core Council of that Institute. So that's very cool. And with that, Dave can you bring us to a slide two please?

>> Dave: I can. [long pause]

>> McKenzie Alright.

>> Dave: Hold on just a second.

>> McKenzie: Sure thing. I'm so glad you're doing this, Dave, because I just, I could not handle all the things on the screen at once.

>> Dave: There you go.

>> McKenzie: This is wonderful. So I just, I wanted to start with a quote. "With all respect due to the ten lepers, the various possessed, and the sundry blind, lame, and deaf faithful of scripture, I reckon people who have disabilities may have been better off for the last two thousand years if our Lord had not created quite so many miraculous cures but occasionally said 'Your life is perfect as it is given to you-- go ye and find its purpose and meaning,' and to onlookers, 'this disability is an ordinary part of human being, go ye and create the miracle of a world free of discrimination.'" And it is Elizabeth Hastings who said that. Dave, next slide please. So I want to start with a few definitions. I'm going to be talking about impairments, so impairment is a physiological and medical designation. Disability is a social phenomenon. We will get to that. The medical model of disability says that impairment is a problem that must be fixed. The social model of disability says a society disables people with impairments when it refuses to take steps to ensure that all members of society have equal access to all the benefits of that society. By way of example, a person using a wheelchair can get basically anywhere they need to if there are automatic doors, curb cuts, accessible transportation, etc. If those things don't exist, it becomes a major problem. And I mean, this is true for many disabilities across the board. And so these folks can't participate in society as one would hope. So the society that has created these structural barriers that cause the disabilities, right? Dave, next slide please. I also want to talk about cure versus healing. So in her essay and her talk Dr. Clark- Soles uses "cure" in the medical sense; it is the elimination of an impairment and it is used at the individual level. Now, healing refers to the person who has experienced integration and reconciliation to self, God, and the community. So disability is a communally-imposed limitation while healing is a communally-based liberation. Slide 5 please. So now we start with our text. First or -- John 1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things come into being through him and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. That's a confusing passage. I have always, always struggled with it because of its wordiness. But basically what I want to bring out here is that the Gospel of John emphasizes creation and incarnation-- Incarnation being God embodied through Jesus, of course, you know, according to the Christian tradition. Note that the capital word "Word" is understood to mean Jesus In this passage. But this passage is saying is that everything came into being by God's design, the diversity of creation is by God's design. Which begs the question, should this diversity be celebrated or overcome? In our context, I would venture this diversity has a lot to do with disabled bodies. Verse three implies that good bodies come in a variety of forms, which means that rather than fixing quote unquote deviant bodies, the concern should be to fix a society to make it inclusive of all bodies. To denigrate disabled bodies is to denigrate the Creator. Dave, can I have the next slide, please? Since we're talking about the incarnation of God, this is a bit of an aside, but Nancy Eiesland is such, was such a wonderful disability theology scholar. So I have to nod to her. She talked about a vision that she had. She said, "I was overwhelmed by this image: God in a sip-puff wheelchair, the kind used by many quadriplegics that enables them to maneuver their chair by blowing and sucking on a straw-like device. Not an omnipotent, self-sufficient God, but neither a pitiable suffering servant. This was an image of God as a survivor, as one of those whom society would label 'not feasible, unemployable with questionable questionable quality of life.'" Nancy's theology after this vision later developed into talking about a God who was disabled by his crucifixion, which brings us to the image there on this slide. He was disabled and he bore the marks of his crucifixion, even after his resurrection. He bore the mark of the spear that went into his side, the nails that went into his hands and feet. And to me, and to many other disabled people, disabled Christians throughout the last couple decades, this has been a really powerful image. Next slide please. So this brings us to John 9, which is our main passage tonight. "As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I'm in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with his saliva, and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 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?' Some were saying, 'It is,' The others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man,' but they kept asking him, 'Then how are your eyes open?' 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.'" So, this passage starts out kind of nice. Jesus immediately disabuses the disciples of the notion that sin caused this man's disability. It says neither this man nor his parents sinned. But to me, here comes the troubling part. Jesus appears to say "Neither this man nor his parents sinned. He was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." To me that begs the question, is this a sick game on God's part, to use this man as a prop in a sort of Divine power play, as a portal for human inspiration? Dave, if you could stop the slides here.

>> Dave: Sure enough.

>> McKenzie: So in a way, this passage reminds me a lot about what is known as "inspiration porn." Probably many of you have heard that term. It was coined by the late Stella Young, and basically, inspiration porn is a portrayal of people with disabilities as being inspirational to able-bodied people, just on the basis of life circumstances. It's happened to me a lot throughout my life. People have said, "You're so brave, you're so strong, you're so inspirational," just for my existing. I think a lot of disabled folks will pretty much tell you this is a universal experience. I suspect that this sort of language can be even even worse amongst church folks exactly because of passages like this. So I want to have a little short discussion. Can anyone think of some examples of inspiration porn they've seen? Be it in movies, TV, it happens a lot in memes on the internet. Anyone?

>> Dave: Well, I would — I can't think of a really good example at the moment, but it does sort of reflect a comic plot, you know the comic plot starts at everything's wonderful, things get bad, everything's wonderful again. And so it turns — it would seem to me that in a way inspiration porn is turning things into comedy.

>> McKenzie: Celia — Cecelia, sorry.

>> Cecelia: I'm thinking of the relationship, I suppose, or the close connection, it seems, between inspiration porn--I hadn't heard that term before, I had not — um and aid pornography, which is something that I criticize. So, you know, humanitarian aid, portrayals of recipients of humanitarian aid, usually non-white people in other parts of the world, sometimes in great suffering, sometimes "differently abled" and sometimes not. But the idea being that, you know, it's okay to take those photographs and then either people are portrayed as though they are not full agents in and of themselves or they're portrayed as happy recipients of this kind of thing. So I think either way there's a lot of connection and sometimes it becomes inspiration porn.

>> McKenzie: Yeah, there's a lot of really interesting intersectionality there. Thank you for that.

>> McKenzie: Yeah, there we go. So these are some really common inspiration-porn sort of images. They're pretty gross, right? If you don't quite see why they're gross I would love to have a conversation with you afterwards. But to me they hurt to look at. Just a second I'm gonna -- yeah there we go. Alright so next slide please, Dave. So I want to do kind of a fun thing here. The interesting thing about the Bible is that it's made from a lot of really old manuscripts in different languages. And in particular, the Greek manuscripts are missing a lot of the elements of our language that we use today. They don't have capitalization, spaces between words, punctuation, and definitely not chapter and verse indicators. So all of these grammatical judgments that are being made to translate to our languages today are judgments made by modern translators. So I want to talk about just the punctuation in this passage. So the way it is written, the way it is presented to us, is, it says, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," semicolon, "he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him," full stop. "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day," semicolon, "night is coming when no one can work." Dave, can you move it to the next one please? So if we rework the punctuation a little bit, to perhaps bring it into closer into concert with what the original writers might have meant, we can change the punctuation in a way that completely changes the meaning of this passage, which I think is really interesting. So it says, "Jesus answered, neither this man nor his parents sinned," full stop. "He was born blind" I put in brackets because that actually doesn't appear in the original manuscripts. So that phrase is optional. So, "He was born blind," full stop. "So God's work might be revealed in him," comma, "we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work." it kind of changes it doesn't it? Does anybody have thoughts on the sort of implications of the reworking of the the punctuation and grammar of this passage? [long pause] Anyone? [long pause] Surely Dave or Jane have some thoughts.

>> Jane: Hilary's hand's up.

>> McKenzie: Oh, Hillary, please!

>> Hilary: Yeah, it definitely makes a difference — and this is very interesting what you point out; I did not know that the Greek did not have punctuation or anything. And this way, however, "he was born blind" is sort of a non-sequitur, if I'm going to be strict on it, so, is-- how do people interpret, you know, the Greek and how is it translated -- is it done literally or more to make sense? That's my only comment. But very good point, yes, it does make it -- meaning very different.

>> McKenzie: Cecelia.

>> Cecelia: I was kind of focused on this second sentence, "So that God's Works might be revealed in him" and then the comma, because I had wondered something similar to what Virginia Madden had wondered about the previous iteration of that. You know, was God saying that up until that time, that this person being born blind had had unique insights or capabilities, and then, you know, the next passage kind of goes and wrecks that by curing the blindness. But this with the punctuation changed seems to take away that possibility, that possible reading. "So that God's works might be revealed in him, we must work the works of him who sent me while while it is a day." So that seems to take away the possibility that -- of the man's unique self. [pause]

>> McKenzie: Yeah, I enjoy this reworking because it takes the power away from the idea that he might be some sort of divine prop, right? And it puts the onus back on the crowd, on the disciples, the implication being, they're to do the work. They're the ones that have to make the change. So I have a note here and it says, "t becomes a fact: the man was born blind. Jesus turns the disciples away from academic speculation into the real person standing there before them. He asks them to consider whether they are going to work for and with God." So Dave can you bring us to slide 12 please? Did you have a thought?

>> Dave: I did. Actually if we would go back to that just for a second.

>> McKenzie: Sure.

>> Dave: I just was going to say, for instance that maybe the key word and the change now is that the "we" over here seems to be stressed as it comes right after the comma, which is kind of where you were headed, wasn't it, with the community now is supposed to be doing the work. The community, the "we," must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. And if the "we" are doing the works, the community is doing the works, then those works might be revealed also in the person in a particular way. And this way may be through cultural acceptance or social adaptations so that the person is able to do all that they're able to do. But I do have this one -- I think I understand what Cecelia is saying at least in one dimension, and that is that the other way there does seem to be a kind of uniqueness in the individual. It makes me think a little bit of the Venus de Milo that Nancy Eiesland talks about in her book The Disabled God, that the Venus de Milo, either by accident or by the creation of the artist was left limbless, and yet her image is just a spectacularly beautiful image. And it may be that the uniqueness of the individual with blindness is not that they are a prop, but just as they are they are amazing and beautiful and, as any creature that is — or any other person or creature that is on the Earth. But then of course you have what follows, which seems to change the nature of the person. So There's a part of me that would somehow like to hold on to both the uniqueness of the person, and also to hold on to the "we-ness" of this passage that is doing a social -- a work within society to reveal the works of God. So I'm feeling the kind of a tension between the two.

>> McKenzie: Cecelia.

>> Cecelia: Yeah, thanks, Dave, for that, because you explained what I was trying to say far better than I did. McKenzie, I hadn't really seen what you had pointed out but now I do see it, the, you know, the we must work the works of him who sent me, the community, and I loved what you had in the beginning, that healing is a communal thing, and that that disability is imposed by the community, right, so, and but there's one more thing I wanted to ask you about, McKenzie. Is it still sort of a problem, though, in your perspective that there's still this opposition between day and night? You know, kind of which implies sight, right?

>> McKenzie: That's not something I have the scholarship to answer -- I think Dave would probably be better to answer that. I know, who is it, John Hull that talks about that in his scholarship, Dave?

>> Dave: Well yes, John Hull -- Hull is a person who became blind in mid-life and had been a Christian all of his life and he became blind in mid- life and laboriously learned how to read Braille, and he was delighted to have -- one of the first Braille books that he had was the Gospel of John, but found himself somewhat stunned by the contrasts between light and darkness within the book, Which led him to the conclusion that the Bible was written for sighted people, people with sightedness, that there was a privileging of a sight. And as a matter of fact, actually, I don't know if you realize this, but I think in a later slide, that you even use something about seeing. I don't know if you meant that ironically, McKenzie or --

>> McKenzie: Yeah, I kind of realized that and I didn't have the energy to like to go back and fix it.

>> Dave: We'll see it when we get there, right. So the short answer to Cecelia is yes, that night and day for a person with blindness, then, is not -- is reminding them in a way, now this person, we're to understand is now able to see so they can see the distinction between night and day. I had a student that I had to work work with in three or four classes who was blind. And I asked him one time, because I went to have one of the agencies on campus make him a feel book so he had these images that were kind of central to the class. And so I was trying to figure out a way that he could participate with knowing something about the images. And so he was able to feel them and he told me he did get some ideas. And he also told me that -- I don't know if this was the experience of any and all — but it was his experience that he had a  -- he had a recollection of sight. So on the screen of his mind he was able to project notions of light and dark. So he wasn't completely -- because he hadn't been born blind like in this story, in this — in John here. He had become blind later on as a child, so he had some memories of light and darkness. But just -- the short answer to your your point is yes, it does represent a problem for people who are not sighted to be continuously reminded, at least going on John Hull's testimony.

>> McKenzie: Thank you, Dave. That is why I am so glad you are here tonight. Because there's a lot I can't speak to. Can we move to the next slide, please? Okay, so given the reworking of this passage, I think there are some questions we can ask ourselves. I'm going to go through them real quick and I just want you to keep them in mind and then we'll come back to them at the end. So the questions to me seem to be: In what ways can we work with God? Are we to work on healing? Remember that healing is the communal response. Who In this passage needs to be healed? is it the one who is blind, or is it the one, the ones who don't see how their biases disable the one with the impediment? Perhaps what needs to be healed most is our ableist society. Dave, can we go to the next slide, please? So I'm making a big jump here, and it's just because there are certain things I want to talk about from my experience . So we're jumping to verse 13. Because the -- some of the aftermath of the healing interests me. So I'll just read the passage real quick. It says, "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?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man,' but they kept asking him, 'Then how are your eyes opened?' He answered them, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "To to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.' They brought to the Pharisees the men who had formerly been blind. Now it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 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.'" So the reason I put the — the only verse I put on the slide is verse 13. "They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind." Because it reminds me a lot about the sort of lack of agency that non-disabled people seem to think that I have as a disabled person. It's just a blip, right? Most people would think nothing of this sentence. I picked this out because in my particular experiences, able-bodied people — non-disabled people -- will grab those in wheelchairs and move them without -- without consent. They'll pick up mobility devices and shove them out of the way into the corner. I can't tell me tell you how many times I myself been approached by strangers in very neutral situations and asked if I needed help. It happened to me just the other night at a conference I went to for our diocese. I'll be walking or standing somewhere in public, on a sidewalk, at a park ,and someone will ask me if I need help. To me it feels like it is presumed that I as a disabled person must not have the agency to decide when and where I walk or stand at any given time. You can ask — again, ask any disabled person; I can pretty much guarantee that this is a universal experience. So you don't need to share these stories out loud, but I'd like everybody to reflect on times, or maybe they've seen this done, or maybe they've done this to a disabled person. So I think it's something that people need to think more about. Alight, so let's have a real discussion now. Remember those questions I posed earlier? We're gonna pop those back on the screen. Dave, that's just the next slide. So let's talk about these questions. In what ways can we work with God? Are we to work on healing? Who In this passage needs to be healed? Is it the one who is blind, or the ones who don't see how their biases disable the one with the impediment? Does our ableist society need to be healed? How can we do that? Have you noticed what parts of your community aren't accessible, either in structure or in attitude, and how can you work for that change? The floor is everybody's. [long pause] And I will sit here in silence until somebody talks. [laughter] Shelly!

>> Shelly: Hello, hi everyone. I am drawn to the first question: In what ways can we work with God? And I preface this by Genesis chapter one verse 26, 27. And we're created b’tselem Elohim, in the image of God. And I think that there's a lot societally that can be done and that needs to be done to ensure that when we look into another person's eyes, we don't see a disability, we don't see a difference, we don't see what's wrong with that person, we don't think about , how can I heal them, how can I help them, what can I do for them. We look into another person's eyes and we see that spark of the Divine in those eyes. And in that, we know that each and every person brings gifts and strengths and talents and that the Divinely given humanity of each person -- You cannot keep looking at disabled people as objects, as a wheelchair, or as "those people." And in my mind, I think, you know, I think, meetings, gatherings such as this are really enlightening and wonderful. What do we do individually to bring this out into the world, this knowledge that people are being seen, not as as being woven in the Divine image, but as something less-than. So, there's lots of different ways to go about change. We have to decide that we need to embark on that change and make that a commitment and a priority. [long pause]

>> Julie: I have two things. One, it's really interesting, because you know, I did healing prayer at St Luke's for about 10 or 15 years, and there was times when people would come in with somebody who had a disability and ask us to pray for their healing and I never looked at it as these passages. So I'm very happy that you're bringing it to people's attention, McKenzie. That's, if we're going to heal our society, we need to put it out there that because somebody looks disabled doesn't necessarily mean they need our help. And I think sometimes when people say, "Can I help you?," it's meant in a caring situation but because we don't know how to handle it, because we don't know what the person is going through or what they can do or what they might need help with. So maybe it's how we cover our discomfort with somebody's disability, is can I help you, let me make it better for you. And then it makes me feel better. So do you think that's part of it?

>> McKenzie: Yeah. I just -- the reason I'm smiling is because occasionally I think of something that happened to me at church, actually, a few years ago, like seven years ago or something. It was this woman, as we were going up for communion, she approached me and she said, "I am going to help you." [laughs] It was a statement, not a question. Which is maybe the most abrasive way this situation has ever happened to me. Somebody, one of my friends, was looking at me and she said my face just fell. So, yeah, I don't know if I'm quite answering your question, but that is where -

>> Julie: You are. But, it's like, I think the conversation that you brought in the last probably two years and even when I was on the Vestry talking about the disability -- making the bathrooms ADA compliant, putting the ramp in and making it better so when we redid the inside of the church that people with disabilities hadn't had a way to get up to take communion or to be -- without having to go up a hundred stairs or whatever. That -- and we wouldn't maybe have paid attention to that if you hadn't brought it to our attention. So, and I think one of the ways to help people who are not disabled to learn how to be, to see our disabilities in watching somebody else's impediment, that we need to talk about it and we need to bring it out there, you know. We can't keep hiding it and we can't keep being that lady that asked, that told you she was going to help you.

>> McKenzie: Yeah. I saw Hillary's hand up first, and then I saw Virginia's and then I saw Jane's.

>> Hilary: I partly agree with, you know, the comments that have been said, and being taught I had to learn rehab medicine, and it gets, you know, the first time you're working with someone who's a wheelchair user, or is using a portable ventilator, it's very scary, and you really -- I'm just letting you know -- that rehab doctors, we need to learn what to do. And a quick story, a gentleman came up to me and he was using a wheelchair. He had only partial use of his arms, did not have use of his legs, and he came up to me and he said, "Oh, Dr. Siebens, can I have a pass to go scuba diving this weekend?" A deep breath and, you know, we act. I said, you know, "Let me look into that," meaning, "What??" And then I went to the attending, and yes, they had a pool program for individuals who had paraplegia. So yes, I wrote the order; he could go scuba diving, I mean he could go swimming. So, there's a lot to be learned. And I too am very grateful, McKenzie, that you've brought this up, because I really haven't thought about it in the Bible except, Oh yeah, they're always talking about people that are 'lame' and this that and the other -- oh yeah this isn't quite right." One other thought, is I know when we work with people that, for instance have trouble speaking, they have like a dysarthria, you know, one of the suggestions is they hold — have a little card and then they hand it to someone and say, I'm not mentally impaired or anything like that, but please just speak more slowly to me. I guess this is with, when you've got some hearing impairment or whatever. But it just shows that I think there are ways that people can gradually become more at ease with this, but it's definitely a learning curve. So thank you for this work.

>> McKenzie: Yeah, I was especially hoping you would come tonight, Hilary, because of your your medical background, so thank you for that very much. Let's see, Virginia.

>> Virginia: I got a couple of things. The one thing is, that I think it is so profound, what the the first lady who is at your church, I didn't see her name -- she disappeared too fast off my screen — but the lady who spoke first tonight, you know at this section. I thought that was so profound, what you said, and I want to repeat it, that you said people will say things to disabled people in order to make themselves feel better, and I think that is where a lot of the problem lies, because we want to be treated like human beings who have to use crutches or who have to use a wheelchair. But we are human beings just like everyone else, and that we're not put on this Earth to give other people opportunities to feel better. And I think when we demand -- and we can do it nicely -- but when we demand equal treatment, you know, we are aware — I'm aware of the days I have to use the wheelchair, and I'm aware of the days that I can use the hemi walker, and I'm aware of the days I can use the cane, you know. And all of us are aware of any equipment that we have to use and that we need to use. And it's not up to anyone to pity us for it. I think it's the difference between pity and compassion.

>> Jane: I think, like several of the people I've heard tonight, a piece of what just keeps going round in my head is your definition that healing is a communal act. And so hearing the question of, are we to work on healing, what struck me is that, of course, that's the whole work we're called to, right? That there's so many ways we don't see God's image in others. And that maybe the glory of God that needs to be revealed is by the eyes of the sighted being opened, and the disciples being able to free themselves from asking the question, "Okay, who sinned?" Like, we need an explanation here. And that it's, how do you open the eyes of those who are sighted. And, you know, I'm drawn back a chunk of years ago -- I was working with a group of high school students, and they were putting together a liturgy in response to one of the healing stories of a person born blind. And one of the students said, well, can I write a poem in response? and I said sure, you know, whatever's gonna work. And one of the lines of the poem that's always -- what he what he did was sort of imagine the blind man -- he was a kid from Washington DC -- he imagined the blind man as someone begging at the Metro stop in DC. And the line of the poem that stuck was, "I am not blinded by sight." And when I think about all the ways in which, in our work at St. Luke's San Lucas in terms of becoming Beloved Community, we're constantly blinded by sight. We're blinded by the implicit biases with which we were formed. You know, all those —

>> McKenzie: Again sI'll just jump in here and say you're using blindness as a metaphor again, which we have to watch.

>> Jane: Right, well, but I think I yes — I mean yes, using blindness as a metaphor, but I think it's also in this passage — part of the freedom is that this person, what may be irrelevant is whether he can see or not see. Like, that's what I'm trying to say, that it may indeed be the healing is around the disciples' need for healing, not his. And so going back to Dave's point with the mumims, like does it --is it — are blindness and sight actually the same to God? Is hearing and not hearing the same to God? And so that's the context — like, does lack of sight blind you, or does it not blind you? So I was trying to make that statement more than using it as metaphor.

>> McKenzie: Yeah.

>> Dave: Now, McKenzie, I wonder if I could riff on that.

>> McKenzie: Please do.

>> Dave: Well of course I'm looking at your second question, "Are we to work on healing?" and if we're talking about healing as being an action for the community in its relationship to all other individuals. And I wonder if the question that Jesus asks in John chapter 5 of the unnamed man that's sitting by the pool of Bethesda, where he asks him, "Are you willing to be healed?" So, I guess what I would wonder is, is the community willing to be healed in terms of its relationship with all other people, including those that seem to be different from them.

>> Virginia: If I can have your permission, there's a poem, it's very short, I came across recently and it's by a fellow -- named Wendell -- let me see, what is his name? Let me pull it up here, just a second guys. Let me see what his name was -- Wendell Berry. And it's the last line that's so important of this. It's called "Our Real Work." "It may be" [clears throat] "that when we no longer know what to do, we have come to our real work, and that when we no longer know which way to go, we have come to our real journey. The mind that is not baffled is not employed," and here's the best part, the last sentence: "The impeded stream is the one that sings." The point I'm making on that is that yes we are -- many of us here tonight and every night here that we've had this -- are disabled, we are, in a way, impeded. But we can still sing. And we may not be singing the same songs that other people are singing. We may not be singing the same words that they're singing, or the same way that they're singing, but we are singing. And I think part of it is up to us to make sure we're heard, make sure that we are recognized as being fellow human beings.

>> Cecelia: One of the things, though, about this passage that still bothers me is the cure, or the giving of sight, to the blind man. And, on the one hand, in this particular passage, I was struck when Dave said in another passage, you know, Jesus asked, "Do you want to be cured?" In this one he doesn't, he just said — and very often, he'll just say to people, go do this, go do that, go do this, go do that, right, in the different miracles. And this is one of those. And we don't — afterward, the man keeps telling people that, yes, he's the one. So he does want to be seen, he wants to be recognized for who he is. But we don't know how he feels about having not had sight and then having had — and then having sight. So we don't really know how he feels about the whole thing. And I guess what I'm struggling with is does that really matter or not? And then, just to throw in another kind of way in which maybe it doesn't matter, is back to your notion which I love so much, about healing as a communal process. So, the disciples at first need to be healed by not saying -- by not assuming this is someone's sin. And then, after the man receives sight and people don't believe him, then all the Pharisees are concerned about is the fact that it's done on the Sabbath. So both of them become kind of structural, communal ways of doing things that don't allow — that constrict dignity, that constrict agency, in a sense. But I guess I still wonder about -- was Jesus kind of giving in by saying, go put the mud on your eyes and then go wash it off.

>> Dave: Well, you could say that he — that in that particular account about the mud, that that was an opportunity for agency — of the person to exercise their own agency. Because if they didn't want -- if they didn't want to have the end result or didn't care about the end result that was implicitly promised, they could have chosen not to put the mud in, or not to remove, not to wash it out at the designated spot, or they could have made some other choice along the way. But that's just a thought. Maybe there was still agency in that situation. But I hear your point, that oftentimes it seems to be more — some of the actions seem to be more commanded than invitations to exercise your own agency.

>> McKenzie: Shelly.

>> Shelly: I kind of want to riff on the mud theme. [Shelly chuckles and David laughs] I'm totally 100% coming from a Jewish background. [chuckles] I love, love Bible study of all kinds. Just thinking about mud -- I mean how many people metaphorically have mud on their eyes, walk around with thick mud, can't open their eyes, don't -- aren't able to see what's right there right in front of them. And the idea of washing that mud away and being able to see, I think is another way to maybe understand that — the communal healing aspect, that in many ways everyone has blindness to something, and it can be washed — just wash it away -- see things from the perspective of never having seen something before. And not only be in wonder of that, but also, just appreciate -- appreciate what's right in front of us, who's right in front of us, get to know who's right in front of us.

>> McKenzie: Thank you again, everybody, for coming -- for my family, co-workers, people from my church, friends. I really appreciate it on a personal level; of course this was not -- it was not just me who made this happen [chuckles] by any stretch. A lot of people from St. Luke's have worked really hard on it. A lot of people in the background whom you have not seen from RespectAbility have worked on it. It has been a community endeavor -- a multi-community endeavor, too, which is difficult and fun and makes it all the more amazing. I'll just say again quickly, that if this has been beneficial to you in any way, to please consider donating either to RespectAbility or St Luke's, both of which are non-profits, and so don't have endless resources to make things like this happen. Yeah, thank you all for coming. I see Shelly has her hand up, and since she is my supervisor I'm going to give her priority. [Shelly laughs]

>> Shelly: This is the first time that RespectAbility has ever partnered with a faith community to discover the theologies -- the different theology of disability that exist, and I want to thank Dave and I want to thank Jane so much for your wisdom and your leadership. And let's do this again; this was awesome.