

God's Vision

10-11 #19

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalms 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

8The 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?" 9Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." 10But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11He 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."

12They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

13They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15Then 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." 16Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. 17So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." 18The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." 22His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 24So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." 25He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" 28Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

35Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." 37Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." 38He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

39Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." 40Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" 41Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains. "

Lent and Advent seem to have some things in common. The darkness of the winter months seem to call us to light candles and prepare for Christ's birth in order to distract us from the oppression of the long nights. Now that the days are getting longer we contemplate the darkness that the period of time leading up to Christ's resurrection entails. We put one candle out each week, instead of lighting one as we do in Advent. The theme of light and darkness – vision and blindness – birth and death, the two seasons mirror each other and yet they all come out at the same place. May we can call them the yin and the yang of Christianity. Throughout all the darkness hope never fails us – for we focus our lives on the teachings of Christ to show us who our God is, and *that sustains us* and guides us through the darkness in to the light of all the seasons of our lives.

Let's take a look at some of the other readings from today on this fourth Sunday of Lent. From the opening hymn and the Psalm for this week, Psalm 23: 2b he leads me beside still waters; (God must lead the psalmist - is he visually impaired in some way?) 4Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil. God is protecting and granting security in the darkest of times and places.

And the Epistle from today is very clear about the contrast of light and dark: Ephesians 5:8-14 8For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— 9for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

And the curious case of Samuel mistaking David's strappingly tall and muscular brothers as the next possible King and God choosing the ruddy youngest Shepherd instead, 1 Samuel 16:7b ". . . for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

God's vision appears to be better than that of us mere humans. Not only can God see the evils that may befall us, but God sees in our hearts as well. According to Theologian Donald P. Olson, "Heart was not the center of emotions for the ancients, although it was included. Heart was the center of one's being: emotion, intelligence, discernment, wisdom, commitment, and character were all elements of heart - perhaps what we call soul. . . . (and) The beauty of one's heart, the loveliness of one's soul surpasses its physical container . . ."

And exposing light into the darkness is to be aware of the shadows we would prefer to avoid - the darkness of the dangerous places on earth such as the valley of shadow of death, but also including the shadows of our own souls which we don't really want to see and accept as being part of us.

God wants to be there for all of our journeys - but the ones to the depth of our souls is the most important journey of our lives. We need the presence of God - the promise of Grace - always with us as we travel into our shame and put light there. For when we expose our darkest parts of ourselves, the light of God's love erases the pain and frees us to be whole and full and to be able to see to help others in need.

Laird Stuart wrote, "Most of us are reluctant to [expose the works of darkness]. Yet there is a great tradition in Christian faith and in the lives of people who have challenged and exposed works of darkness . . . One obvious example would be the slave trade and segregation. There are people working now to expose current forms of slavery and human trafficking. Yet this is only one in a long list of social ills that warrant attention. Staying neutral contributes to the problem. Choosing innocence over awareness allows injustices to continue."

But let's return to the sermon scripture for today. Some have referred to it as John's most brilliant composition. A blind man receives vision and is harassed by his religious leaders, who seem to want to try everything possible to deny Jesus' role in it. The formerly blind man slowly comes to awareness that Jesus is more than a man, he is holy and he wants to be a disciple. He sees more than with his eyes - he understands fully, and in contrast, those leaders in the community who have had vision all their lives become blind to who Jesus is, and therefore are lost in the darkness; because they refuse to recognize the holy and the good, and only focus on the fact that a Sabbath law may have been broken. Laws at the sake of compassion - we have this social ill even today.

Jesus shows that he and his father are one - there are no dark places in his soul where God is not - and because of this, Jesus has the ability to see what those who are suffering and desirous of wholeness need, and to deliver it. And he doesn't do it for any other reason than to show others that God is there - God is light - God exposes the truth - even if that truth is that we all have dark places.

May we focus during these last few weeks of Lent upon the light and vision of God. God sees with compassion into our needs, and helps us to see the needs of others.