

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish
Newark, DE
The Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 26, 2017/Year A
1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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May my words reveal the greater glory of God.

AMEN

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Each Lenten Season, we are graced to spend time navigating the rich, deep, complex, and LONG stories of John's Gospel. I watch as the people gathered take out the lectionary insert, scan the readings for the day, come to the Gospel, **and then** ... An inaudible groan forms on the lips, we roll our eyes and look at our watches thinking **"This will be another long service today."** With so much of life going on around us, we are **very busy people**, and our time is **very important**. We have many **things to do, people to see, places to go ... GET TO THE POINT, ST. JOHN!**

So this brings us to the story unfolded in John's Gospel today, another LONG one. We are engaged with many characters in this story – the disciples, the crowds and the community, the parents, the religious authorities, and oh yes, Jesus -- in the seven distinct scenarios that unfold in the LONG story.

However, **one person** is never seen, never REALLY seen, by anyone in the story but Jesus. How often are we so caught up in our **very busy and very important lives** that we do not see, REALLY see, the other among us, the other missing from us.

Do you SEE me, now?

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In today's Gospel, Jesus and the disciples encounter the man born blind. The disciples follow the path of debating Levitical law and the reason for the man's blindness. Jesus knows that this is another teachable moment for the disciples, and all who believe, to SEE the power and presence of God's Spirit working in and through him.

The preparation of the clay mixture, laced with Jesus' spit, continues to be a practice of healing in many cultures. Jesus places the mixture on his eyes, with the **added power of prayer**, and sends him away – *"Go, wash in the pool of Siloam [which means Sent]."* Can you imagine the challenge for the blind man to find his way to the Pool of Siloam? But he does as Jesus tells Him, he FINDS a way to find his way. He arrives at the Pool of Siloam, washes his eyes, and his sight is restored for the first time in life. *Siloam* is also translated as **Sent One**, the same meaning for **a disciple or apostle**. This healing comes not from the water alone, but through the blind man's faith to become the **Sent One** for God and Jesus Christ.

Now the fun begins, although not so much fun for the man born blind. His parents, neighbors, the Pharisees, and others begin to question and discount his miraculous healing. First of all, it was done on the Sabbath, so strike one right there! These groups are the antithesis image to God's power for John, those who are trained to spiritually see God's work in the world **cannot see at all**. They reject this healing as the power of God working through Jesus based on **what they KNOW** as received in the traditions, the Law of Moses, and Sabbath practices.

This was certainly not inside the box they have placed God. Jesus sees beyond our **God boxes** into the heart and soul. Jesus saw the deep desire of the man to be healed and live in **the light and sight of God's Spirit**. No matter the experience of the man, no matter his place in society or his religious practice, it is **his desire** and his encounter with Jesus that now gives him sight. The Pharisees repeat their argument based on the "box" that their God fits. Jesus certainly did not, nor would not, fit in their box.

For to TRULY SEE God and Jesus at work in our world and our lives, we must **open the eyes of our hearts in faith** like the man born blind. Moving from the old ways of looking and perceiving the "inside our box" world to TRULY SEE God and Christ in people, places, and things all around us, every single day, where we would never have imagined seeing the Spirit of our living God.

Jesus now looks to you and me, into the eyes of our hearts and souls of faith. Can we release those set-in-stone ways of LOOKING at our world? Will we invite God's Spirit into our hearts and souls to TRULY SEE God's love in our lives, in the lives of others, and in the lives of our world? In his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus saw a person **needing compassion and healing** while the disciples saw **a theological problem to be solved**. Jesus saw **someone hurting** while the disciples wanted to **argue about theodicy**.

Faith seeking understanding has its place in our life. Yet I am reminded that, in the final analysis, what hurting people DESIRE are not facile theological answers to unanswerable questions by **majoring in the minors**. They need YOU – YOUR love, YOUR understanding, the Jesus IN YOUR presence and compassion and care.

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Do you SEE me, now? Who is missing from our midst that we have not seen for a while? Who is here, RIGHT IN FRONT OF US, which we do not see, REALLY see for who they are as the child of God, bearing the light of Jesus, just like you and me? How many do we see through the **filtered sight** of preconceptions by class, race, creed, or countless other "isms" we have come to know, and at times even embrace?

In the book *Tortured Wonders*, Rodney Clapp asks some difficult questions about the challenges we face. Why don't we see such miraculous transformations before our own eyes? Clapp writes of an experience one summer of seeing a tired old woman leaning on a cane and moving slowly, grimacing with each step. Children scurried past her slow, painful gait. Adults and others paid little attention to this painful journey. They just saw **another old woman**. She carefully edged her way to the swimming pool, laid her cane aside, sat down, donned goggles, cupped water onto her arms and torso, and slid into the pool.

Clapp watched as she stretched and pushed away from the pool wall. **“Her strokes were fluid, full of grace. Her arms and feet churned economically, cutting the water smoothly with small, neat splashes. Her face lightened as she appeared to have lost herself somewhere beyond pain. She swam one, two, four laps before I stopped counting. Now she was, without any doubt, beautiful”** He continues, **“Christian hope is something like that. We expect a renewed, transformed creation, a medium in which our bodies, themselves renewed, will thrive and be more themselves than ever before. Beautiful is just one word for it.”**

Tell me, what do you plan to do with your one wild and precious life ... Do you SEE me, now?

AMEN