

Was Blind but Now I See
4 LENT A 2008

Imagine being blind. I don't think you and I can really imagine that. Certainly not like those who attend the School for the Blind here in Janesville. Unless you've felt it, and looked into the mirror carefully you probably have no idea of the blindness of the human soul. The line from John Newton's hymn, Amazing Grace, "was blind but now I see," speaks of that kind of blindness.

Most of us have had eye exams. And if we keep them up as we get older our lenses change and get stronger because our vision is weak. Technically, we are going blind.

This morning, we see how Jesus healed a man that was born blind. As we look at this story, it's going to become clear that this is our story – Jesus wants to heal us too, but from a different kind of blindness. Jesus literally changed the way this man saw the world, and Jesus can do the same thing for us.

BLINDNESS COMES IN MANY FORMS, AND WE ARE BY NO MEANS IMMUNE TO IT.

There are three forms of it in our readings today. We read of social blindness with regard to how Saul is chosen as king. We read of uncovering spiritual blindness in our second reading when the deeds of darkness are exposed by the light. And lastly in the gospel there is a story of the first two forms along with the physical blindness of the young man.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SEE OURSELVES AS GOD SEES US?

Certainly, if we could see ourselves through our neighbors' eyes, most of us would modify the way we live. More than likely, such insight would compel us to clothe ourselves with the true selves we want others to see.

If we could derive such advantage from seeing ourselves through our neighbors' eyes, how much greater would we benefit, if we could see ourselves through God's eyes? Would we like what we see?

What if we saw ourselves through God's eyes, through the lens of scripture, prayer and communion with His people? Surely we'd drive ourselves with less fury and more mercy. In the end, we'd find ourselves expending less energy and being happier with the result. Personal insight is difficult to gain and harder to apply. That's why there are counselors. **There are too many trees in the forest for us to see the light.**

History can be seen as a series of lessons where a people forgot or refused to learn. One case after another, God's people could have reviewed their history and been spared the consequences of ill-conceived undertakings.

A prime example of that is found in today's reading from Samuel.

Against the prophet's better judgment the people prevailed on Samuel for a king of their own. Samuel anointed a man named Saul whom the people chose to lead them. The most telling flaw in this undertaking was the method by which the new king was chosen. Saul was selected on completely human terms not spiritual ones.

Saul's first qualification was that he was tall; he stood head and shoulders taller than everyone else. If his height wasn't enough, it could be pointed out that Saul had been very successful in battle. Some might argue that President "Ike" Eisenhower was elected for this quality.

No one seems to have noticed how little any of this mattered, in terms of governing skills, except Samuel; and no one was listening to him. Saul was, quite simply, the man of the moment. The people were so devoted to the idea of a royal house that Samuel was left with no option but to anoint Saul as king.

Later Samuel is about to make the same mistake and is led to the home of a man named Jesse where he meets a family of handsome and sturdy young men. Listening to his own heart, he is on the brink of picking the oldest son, when God intervenes and teaches him a priceless lesson: **"THE LORD SEES NOT AS A MAN SEES."** "But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does

not see as mortals see; they look on the **outward** appearance, but the LORD looks on the **heart**." Call it social blindness. Twenty-first century Americans have a serious case of it.

At the end of the day, Samuel anoints a shepherd boy named David to lead the people of God.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SEE AS GOD SEES US?

The lessons have yet to be learned. WE JUDGE OURSELVES BY EXTERNAL STANDARDS.

These standards almost never address our true worth as human persons, created in the image and likeness of God. That's a shame because our inability to see ourselves as God sees us is a peculiar kind of preventable blindness. That preventable blindness keeps us from the fullness of God's purpose for us and the healing that awaits us.

The heart of today's Gospel reading is really about that peculiar sort of PREVENTABLE BLINDNESS. The story is of a beggar blind from birth whose physical blindness was cured but the blindness of society and of religion is not cured. It is strange that it takes a miracle greater than the one Jesus performed on the blind man for everyone else involved to get healed. That would require amazing grace!

John's gospel would have us know that Jesus is God's Salvation "Sent" to the world. The name Siloam means "sent." What he wants us to see is that the whole world is blind and Jesus is the healing for its disease.

But irrelevant questions persist from those remaining blind. The disciples want to know why the man was blind in the first place. The Pharisees ask how a man of unknown origin, and a man who is not properly certified, could heal anyone of anything and didn't he know the Sabbath comes first? Jesus must be a sinner! People say their most small minded thoughts. Too bad we don't keep them to ourselves!

The obvious facts that the blind man needed to be healed, and that

Jesus healed him, went by without anyone taking much notice. Is there something missing from the story? It's the celebration! How sad!

The Pharisees cannot see themselves as God sees them because it is counter to what they choose to believe. Instead of giving light their religion gave them darkness.

THEIR BLINDNESS PREVENTED THEM FROM SEEING A DIFFERENT LIGHT FROM ANOTHER WORLD.

What the blind man now saw was the assurance of his experience and the evidence in his life that he had been healed. We also must not be distracted from declaring what we say during baptism and on our own experience of faith. Faithful Christians must continue to speak out though the world will refuse to hear and say, "You have no authority!" **FACING HARD TIMES IN FAITH MAKES IT BOLD.**

How can we see with the eyes of faith? First, can we admit that we are blind beggars and we have to get the mud out of our eyes? The gift of Lent is to identify our blindness and seek God's healing. In Lent, we are encouraged to ask for **THE GIFT OF SEEING OURSELVES AS GOD SEES US.**

Second, the same Savior who healed the man born blind stands ready to heal our blindness, no matter what form it takes. Through forgiveness and mercy we step into God's Light. Like the beggar who became an eloquent defender of Jesus others can see healing in our lives and just might give God thanks and open their lives to Him. May God help us to see our blindness and perform his great work of healing in our lives. **AMEN**