

Ps 23; 1 Sam 16:1-13; Eph 5:8-14; Jn 9:1-41
4th Sun in Lent 3-26-17-Was Blind, But Now I See

A few years ago, my daughter and her then boyfriend came to visit me in New Mexico. Kylan had never seen Carlsbad Caverns, so we went. The whole experience is stunningly beautiful. There is an optional excursion into a room that receives absolutely no exterior light. It's trail is lit with electric lamps. But, on this little hike the park ranger has the group sit on the low wall along the trail. Then, she has a fellow ranger turn all the lights out, so visitors can experience total darkness. It's interesting how many cell phones came out when the lights were turned off! But, our ranger instructed everybody to put all sources of light away and sit still long enough for our eyes to adjust to the blackness of the cavern. We are accustomed in the world to having some level of light, so that after a few minutes, our eyes adjust and we see by whatever light there is. But in the cavern there is none, so your eyes continue to experience complete darkness.

Try to imagine never seeing light or colors, or the faces of your loved ones and friends. That is hard

to imagine, if you are a sighted person. This is difficult, even if you are someone with impaired vision. There is much support in our time for blind persons. We have transportation help, training and education for adapting to sighted society. We have braille projects in public places, in printed materials and audible computers, phones and literature. Very different from what this man Jesus healed – had back in the day. The man born blind begged for his living.

So, after trying to imagine seeing no light – just imagine experiencing the miracle of our Gospel story for today – imagine it happening to you! What strikes me in this narrative is how little support the man who can now see gets from bystanders, temple officials and even his own family. He is doubted, left with no witnesses to his former blindness and finally kicked out of the church! All for the sake of an amazing miracle that Jesus performs in his life.

Doesn't seem like good news, if he looks to his community to affirm his healing. How sad. Nobody is rejoicing with him – or congratulating him. Jesus, it turns out, is the only person who

encourages him – and gives him hope for a new life – even a new kind of life – filled with light and seeing everything. The people take the man to the Pharisees. Remember it is the Sabbath.

Abraham Heschel said, “God is not a hypothesis derived from logical assumptions, but an immediate insight, self-evident as light. He is not something to be sought in the darkness with the light of reason. He is the light.” (brainyquote.com) Heschel, a beloved Jewish thinker, derived this wisdom from the Old Testament, not the New Testament. We see that the Pharisees are without excuse in their skepticism and pride.

What is going on when Jesus of Nazareth performs this mighty work in the very body – in the flesh of the man born blind? The disciples ask Him, “Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind?” (v 2) Jesus completely reframes the purpose in terms of God’s glory displayed in the here and now. Even the Bible passage from the Letter to the Ephesians is in context of the works of darkness. But, the Lord Jesus draws our attention to the works of light. He says, “This happened so that God’s mighty works might be

displayed in him (the blind man begging on the street). We still anticipate and we still watch for such mighty works in our own day and time.

We are not called to be naïve about what goes on in our world. There are works of darkness being done everywhere. No, we are led by Jesus to “live as children of light,” as the Apostle Paul teaches. (cf Eph 5:8) We are called to, “...test everything to see what is pleasing to the Lord, and don’t participate in the unfruitful actions of darkness. Instead...reveal the truth about them.” (vv 10-11) Revealing the truth is a prophetic call. We answer our calling by the way we live. It is not a theological exercise, it is living into the Light of the World – the presence and the person of Jesus.

What does the light of Jesus’ presence reveal about the community in Jerusalem? The folks who have put offerings into his begging bowl are not sure that he’s who he says he is. They expected him to continue as he was – no change. These guys in the church want this man who can now see to discount and deny Jesus. They interview his parents, but they are afraid and

won't affirm his former blindness. The man won't deny Jesus' power. So, the Pharisees curse him and kick him out. Do we affirm others when they show up in our midst?

Jesus seeks and finds the rejected man and reveals to him, in his rejection, exactly who is standing before him. This revealing is both physical and spiritual. The man believes in Jesus the Messiah – the Christ. The Man from God.

Jesus came to give sight to the spiritually blind, but also to bring those who think they see without Him to judgment. Jesus knows everything about being rejected, humiliated and unjustly punished.

Some Pharisees stayed close to see and hear what Jesus shared with the man He healed. Jesus says "I have come into the world to exercise judgment so that those who don't see can see and those who see will become blind."

Isaiah 6:10 (NKJV)

"Make the heart of this people dull,
And their ears heavy,

And shut their eyes;
Lest they see with their eyes,
And hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart,
And return and be healed.”

The small group of Pharisees look around and ask, “Surely we aren’t blind, are we?” They blasphemed the Lord of Life. Would any of them confess, “I was blind, but now I see”? I pray there were some – one or two – or more. Amen.