

Lent 4A March 22, 2020

[1 Samuel 16:1-13](#); [Psalm 23](#); [Ephesians 5:8-14](#); [John 9:1-41](#)

John 9:1-41

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 am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the 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 neighbours 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 were your eyes opened?' 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.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a 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.' Some 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. So 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.'

The 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 and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but 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.' His 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. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

So 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.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He 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?’ Then they reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.’ The man answered, ‘Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’ He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped him. Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We see”, your sin remains.

So who thought we would be here today? A lot has happened in a week. Last Sunday, we met for our regular services, with some restrictions, no wine, no physical contact, hand sanitizers at strategic locations; and with the caution to limit our gathering to 150 people, which I thought would make a great marketing ploy. We could advertise our services and put on our sign out front: *Free entry to the 1st 150!*

Instead, this week I posted bright yellow signs on all our doors saying we must take the unprecedented step to close our doors to the public. This cathedral which is known for its open doors, finds itself shuttered. At a time in our planet’s history where we all could use an enormous, comforting, group hug; we must distance ourselves from one another. In some locations, total lock-down restrictions are in place, no one is allowed out of their homes.

Yesterday I was in my car, listening to music, and I’m a firm believer that music should be played loudly (why else would there be a ‘10’ on the control knob?) and a song came on my playlist by the late Swedish DJ, electronic artist Avicii; *Wake Me Up - When It’s All Over*. I think that’s probably how most of us feel right now.

Now a word about today’s readings; for those who may be dropping in on an Anglican service for the first time; we don’t *pick* the readings, they are part of a lectionary cycle that has been around for more than 30 years. The readings are set for each Sunday, and it often amazes me

how the texts speak to the moment we find ourselves in. If ever there were a time to read the comforting words of the 23rd Psalm this is it!

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want, or as some translations read, I shall have no fear. For YOU are with me. Even in the valleys, shadowed by death, we are not alone.

The Epistle from the letter to the Ephesians is calling us to be children of light, in times of darkness.

Are these readings a coincidence? I wonder.

Despite the grim situation we find ourselves in, and let's face it, NONE of us have ever experienced anything like this; God does indeed send shepherds among us. There are children of light, poking holes in the darkness even as we speak.

Let us remember with grateful hearts the doctors, nurses, and researcher workers, who are working tirelessly during this pandemic. And for our leaders in every facet of our community striving to keep us connected, informed, and safe. Sometimes even from ourselves.

The theme for our Lenten journey this year has been *Into the Wilderness*, and in the main body of the Cathedral we constructed a mini dessert 4 feet by 8 feet, to depict that journey into the unknown, and also to demonstrate that even in the barren, and wilderness places we find ourselves in - there is life.

Today's Gospel in its way too has a message for us. It is the story of a blind man who has his eyesight restored.

It is a very long Gospel and, again, I didn't pick it, it was chosen in advance. And it is powerful in its descriptive narrative. It would make a wonderful, staged, mini-play as all the characters and lines are quite dramatic, and I think to see it acted out would make it all the more powerful than simply hearing it read. (Although Archbishop Ron did a fine job.)

So I'm not going to re-tell the story now. Someone once said, a long Gospel, requires a short sermon. I get that.

In a thumbnail sketch, Jesus and his disciples meet a man who has been blind since birth, he is well known in the community, a fixture, sitting daily by the side of the road looking for handouts to survive.

The disciples ask a theological question, not "what can we do to help this person?" but, "Who sinned? Was it this man or his parents? Why was he born blind? Was it his fault? Or did someone in his family do something wrong to cause this?"

Now we might be quick to criticize the disciples, for their insensitivity, but we do the same thing; we can't help but pass by someone, say on Spring Garden road shaking a Tim's cup, or at

an intersection and wonder - not; “what can I do to help here”, but “what have *they* done, or not done, to end up here?”

So Jesus goes over to him, and in a rather unique way, heals the man.

But this story is not really about the healing. We are reading this from the Gospel of John, and John has told us in the opening pages of his Gospel that Jesus is the son of God. In fact he says God and Jesus are one and the same. “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things came into being through him and without him nothing was made.*”

I point that out simply because if you’ve been engaged in creating creation, healing a blind man is pretty simple stuff.

This is not simply about the miracle of healing. It’s about the lesson that surrounds it.

Because what is really going on here, is a challenge NOT for the physically blind to see, but for those who have no excuse, who have eyes, to see what is right before them.

Jesus kicks the stool out from under the political and religious leaders who see the healing of a blind man as an affront. First, it is obvious that this man is blind because of his own sin or the sin of his family, so for Jesus to heal him throws that whole *cause and effect* theology into question. And the fact that Jesus would do something like this on a Sabbath day, a holy day of rest – is the icing on the cake; he’s aligned himself with sinners.

Instead of the whole community rejoicing that someone who was once blind, can now see, and living happily ever after, this healing is a major inconvenience!

The authorities even question the man at the center of this, and his parents, as if it is their fault that what was once a normal way of seeing and relating to the world has been turned upside down.

This is not how it’s supposed to be. This requires seeing the world differently. That’s the message here.

So what can we glean from this, in this time of pandemic. Are we not being challenged to see the world differently? To reassess our presumptions, our world views, our priorities?

Never before have we been so keenly aware of how interconnected we are. How our actions can make differences that have global ramifications! Edward Lorenz postulated, in chaos theory, something he termed; The Butterfly Effect. He asserted that simple disturbance of air caused by the fluttering of a butterfly can alter the world. Covid-19 has spread globally, affecting all of us.

Going viral has never had a more poignant and power meaning before. We too are seeing the world today very differently. And in some ways we never can go back.

This wilderness journey we are in - let it be a time for change.

Reach out to your neighbours, call those people you keep meaning too but never have time for. Tell the people you love that you love them. Go for a walk and breathe the fresh air unperfumed by Purell, stare up at the stars, soak in the sun's rays. Read some good books, play some good music (loudly) watch some good movies. And for heaven's sake don't watch Contagion, (the number one Apple download), or Zombie apocalypse films. I know there is some strange comfort in knowing that things could always be much worse than they are – but STOP. Find a good musical, watch the Lord of the Rings, the extended version, you've got time! Or the Sound of Music – or Pollyanna – yes Sarah, Pollyanna. And if the constant barrage of grim news and scary statistics coming at you from every media outlet is overwhelming, shut it off!

Be a shepherd to someone that might be alone or anxious, and thank those who are shepherding you. Be a light for someone that needs hope, and seek out the light yourself. See the world through a different lens; it means something; now more than ever. We are in this together, and we will get through this together.

Speaking of The Lord of the Rings, there is a very moving scene in the movie “The Two Towers”.

Frodo Baggins, the hobbit entrusted with the task of carrying a magical ring back to its source in order to destroy it, lest it become a potential for future evil, is overcome by the dark power that lies within the ring: He in his delusion, even attempts to kill his most trusted and faithful companion Sam. In this scene, Frodo collapses, he is spent, the weight of the world has worn him down, and he feels utterly defeated.

“I can't do this Sam,” he moans.

And Sam, grasping Frodo by the shoulder tries to encourage him; “I know by rights we shouldn't even be here, but we are. It's like in the great stories Mr. Frodo, the ones that really matter. Full of darkness and danger they were, and sometimes you didn't want to know the end – because how could the end be happy? How could the way go back to the way it was, when so much bad had happened? But in the end it is only a passing thing, this shadow – even the darkness must pass. The new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. These were the stories that stayed with you, that meant something; even if you were too small to understand why. But I think Mr. Frodo, I do understand – I know now. Folk in these stories had lots of chances of turning back only they didn't. They kept going because they were holding on to something.”

“But what are we holding onto Sam?” begs, Frodo

To which Sam replies: *“That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for.”*

I don't have to tell any of you about the darkness, because in one form or another, it touches each one of us. But it will not overcome us. We are in this together and we will come out the other side.

Liturgically, things are different now, church-wise or season has been interrupted. Easter may be on hold, but resurrection is never out of season.

Amen

