

4 Lent 3/22/2020
 Ken Wratten at St Luke's
 1 Samuel 16:1-13
 Psalm 23
 Ephesians 5:8-14
 John 9:1-13, 28-38

Today's Scriptures are not about physical vision, but spiritual vision.

God sent Samuel out to find the man who would be chosen to succeed Saul as king of Israel. Saul was being forced into retirement because he disobeyed God. Samuel tried to help God choose the best person for the job. Samuel said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord". God said, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature... the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Samuel was learning that God's ways are not our ways. We need to learn God's ways.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "Everything exposed to the light becomes visible". Paul is telling the Ephesians and us how important it is to have good spiritual vision: it helps us see the path God sets out for each of us.

In John 8:12, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Today's Gospel lesson tells about a man blind from birth, who was healed and given sight by Jesus. But it is more deeply a story about opposite responses to Jesus. The blind man moves from physical blindness to physical sight, then to spiritual sight, and receiving new life. The Jewish authorities moved from physical sight to spiritual blindness, as they closed themselves off to the light that is Jesus.

The disciples questioned whose sin it was that made the man blind. That was a common belief in that day, and I think a lot of people still believe it. I am sure there are people who think what we are going through now with the Coronavirus is caused by the sins of the world.

The rabbis had developed the principle that "There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity". They thought a child could sin in the womb, or her soul might have sinned in a preexistent state. They also believed that punishments came on certain people because of the sin of their parents.

But Jesus makes it very clear in this story that is not how God works. The man's blindness was not a punishment for his sins, or for his parents' sins.

[Tell again the story of Candace and pile of wood.] "What did I do to make God mad?" The Old Testament has lots of stories that show us that God can get very

unhappy when we sin. But there are lots of other sources of ‘bad’. Other people’s sin or bad judgment can hurt me; and there is the random chance that comes out of chaos. Ex profundo versus ex nihilo. Jesus ignored the source of the man’s blindness. The important thing was the opportunity this gave to offer new spiritual vision. **That is the God I worship; a loving and forgiving God; a God who will use whatever life throws at us as a chance for us to turn to Him.**

Jesus didn’t only give physical sight to the blind man and then walk away; he came back to the man. When Jesus found him, he said “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” Jesus wanted more than healing of his physical vision; he wanted healing of his spiritual vision too. And so he gave the healed man the spiritual vision to see who Jesus really was; not just a healer; not just a prophet; but the Son of God; and the man worshiped Jesus. Spiritual vision transformed the healed man.

As you and I live out our purpose as children of God, Jesus is expecting us to be very intentional about looking at the things that happen in life, and the experiences of God and the beauty of creation that are all around us, with our spiritual vision turned on.

I pray that you and I can look around us as if we were looking with God’s eyes, and not our own physical eyes.

And that what we see through those eyes transforms us.

It might be a hurt we intentionally have caused on someone.
or a hurt we unintentionally caused others. Or the blessing of surprise of a friend delivering eggs into our mail box...

It might be the selfishness of others. Or the generous offer of toilet paper – who would have guessed **that** being a treasured sign of God’s love?

You see the character traits that Jesus modeled and they change you.

You see the love God holds for you and it changes you.

You see your family, all the people you love and who love you back, your health, that they are gifts of love from God and that changes you.

God chose David to be the king of Israel, looking through eyes that could see into the heart of the boy shepherd. Jesus announced that he is a light to the world. And then Paul begged the people in the Ephesus Church to live in that light. Jesus gave us examples in his healing of the blind man; how a person can risk shutting him/herself off from the light (like the rabbis), or a person can accept the “light of life”, and receive a spiritual vision that changes their lives.

I pray that these Scripture lessons about 'spiritual vision' touch each of us to share with our families, our next door neighbor, the mail carrier, the grocery clerk, and with anyone feeling anxiety and stress during our 'shelter in place' time...

That God brought us a light that overcomes all this. He gives us a power living in us that can keep us calm, help us be a non-anxious presence for the people around us, and in the process, sharpen our own spiritual vision. God bless each of you, your families, and those you love. Amen.