

Homily at St. John in the Wilderness  
Sunday, July 28, 2024  
2 Samuel 11:1-15, Psalm 14, Ephesians 3:14-21, John 6:1-21  
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*“Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.”*

Well, I got the news recently from my eye doctor that I have a fast growing cataract in one eye that needs to be removed. This did not come as a huge surprise as I have been having more and more difficulty seeing clearly. Tiny beads that I have used in beadwork for many years are getting very hard to see and even reading has become a challenge. My eye is becoming cloudy and I can no longer see clearly. For those of you who have had cataract surgery, and I am guessing many of you have, you understand this.

A number of years ago Stephen and I spent some time in Africa - helping out at a church/school complex in Tanzania. In addition to painting rooms at the school, singing with children, and preaching at churches nearby, we also visited an eye clinic. Now, we were told before the trip that the eye clinic there needed used eye glasses. And so we gathered up many pairs donated by people in the congregation and packed them in our luggage.

One day, with that large package of glasses in hand, we walked several miles up a hill to the eye clinic. Doctors came to the clinic infrequently and patients who needed surgery (often cataract surgery) walked from many miles away. We saw some of these patients, being led by family members - because they could not see at all - over miles of rocky and dangerous terrain. They were camping there near the clinic, cooking their meals on small fires on the ground while they waited for surgery.

We handed the package of glasses to the woman who headed up the clinic and she graciously thanked us, but also told us that she really didn't have any way to use what we had brought. We were crestfallen. What had sounded like a great idea, wasn't. We, nor the person who had told us of this supposed need, had taken the time to confirm that old glasses were really needed there.

Richard Rohr speaks to our tendency of rushing into action at his Center for Action and Contemplation. When he opened this center, he saw a great need for the integration of both contemplation and action. He says, "Prayer without action can promote our tendency to self pre-occupation. Action, even well intentioned actions, can cause more harm than good if not coupled with contemplation." Basically, we need to be able to see clearly through prayer and contemplation before we blindly rush into action of any kind.

This was the situation David found himself in as he gazed at the beautiful woman, Bathsheba, who was bathing on a nearby rooftop. His eyes were so clouded (much like a cataract) with his own lust and desire for this woman, that he totally forgot to think and pray first. He rushed out and took what he wanted. The first consequence of his misguided action was Bathsheba's pronouncement that she was pregnant with his child.

So David, continuing his downward moral spiral, had her husband, who was off fighting a war, come back to town. The plan was that he could pin the pregnancy on the husband and all would be well. But the upstanding husband, Uriah, refused to be with his wife while his fellow soldiers were living in dangerous conditions out on the battlefield.

So, again spiraling further downward, David ordered the commander to send Uriah to the place of heaviest fighting and Uriah was killed. All because David had made a bad decision without much (or any) thought, prayer, or contemplation. Of course David's troubles were not over with Uriah's death, but that is a story for another time.

It is amazing that events showing King David at his best and those that show him at his worst are included in the Biblical accounts. One benefit to us is that we can see God's abundant and overflowing grace, despite human shortcomings, to David and to us - all both sinners and saints.

Years after the time of King David and even years after Jesus ministered to the people of Palestine, the author of Ephesians (probably a disciple of Paul's) wrote a letter to the Christians in Ephesus. Now Ephesus, at that time, was an affluent, thriving, and important seaport. Ephesus is where Mary, the mother of Jesus lived with the apostle John after her son's death. There were fine homes there, decorated beautifully with designs made of small tiles and a huge library filled with over 12,000 scrolls. It was the commercial, intellectual, and religious center of the Romans - second only to Rome.

But the religion practiced in Ephesus was not Christianity. And for the early Christians there, there was much persecution and the community in which Paul had spent about 3 years, was struggling to keep going. They met in secret with fear they would be discovered and imprisoned or killed.

The author of the letter they received, our book of Ephesians, knew their condition. He knew that their eyes needed to be able to see clearly the Spirit at

work within their community - despite the struggles of their daily lives. He sought to open their eyes to the power of love and what God could do through that love. Even when that looked impossible.

He said, “I pray that, according to the riches of God’s glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.”

And the Christians living in Ephesus did turn their eyes and hearts to the strength of the Spirit and that same city, years later, played a vital role in the spread of Christianity.

Zooming back now about 35 to 50 years earlier than this letter to the Ephesians, we encounter Jesus in today’s gospel, about to exhibit a miracle to a large group of people who had gathered to hear him speak up on a mountain near the Sea of Galilee. Now the miracles Jesus performed were one reason many people were attracted to him and, of course, one way he could demonstrate God’s power and love. So many people had come to hear him that day.

When Jesus spoke with his disciple, Philip, about how they could come up with food for the over 5,000 people on the limited resources they had, Philip was perplexed. He looked, as we probably would have, at the problem through eyes of practicality. He said, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” In other words, we can’t do it - it is impossible.

But Jesus, through his clear and unclouded eyes of love, saw the situation differently. He knew that what looked impossible could, indeed, be very possible with God's help.

One commentator writes that at the end of **our** knowledge - in this case a practical evaluation that so many people could not possibly be fed with so little food - at the end of **our** knowledge ... stands Jesus. And Jesus is there to open our clouded eyes to see beyond reason - to love. And as we look at situations through the eyes of divine love, we see that there is an abundance we had not seen before. There was enough food for everyone (with lots left over) that day beside the Sea of Galilee.

We, at this church, see that there is enough, through the eyes of love, to provide weekend food to school children who would otherwise go hungry - right here in our own community. We have seen beyond the practical to what God can and will provide when we move to action after first much prayer and contemplation. We know what the writer of Ephesians means when he speaks of being able to accomplish abundantly far more, with God's help, than we could ever ask or imagine.

May we, here at St. John in the Wilderness, always keep our eyes unclouded and clear and our hearts open to the power of the Spirit as we continue to function as transformative agents for good in our church, our community, and in the world.

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