

**I Sam. 16:1-13  
Ps. 23, Eph. 5:8-14  
John 9:1-41**

**Sermon  
By  
The Rev. Stephen Askew**

**4th Sunday of Lent  
March 19, 2023  
St. John in the Wilderness**

**“Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.”**

Did you hear? Did you hear there’s a man who actually healed someone who had been blind from birth! Yes, his name is Jesus, and this was the fifth or sixth miracle or sign he has performed in the region, and the second on a sabbath no less. His followers assumed that either the man or his parents must have sinned for him to be born blind, but Jesus assured them that neither sinned, rather, this was to reveal God’s power. And, did you hear that many town’s people did not even recognize the man after he was healed; they had only known him as a beggar on the side of the road? The man insisted that it was he who had been healed, and explained that Jesus spit on the ground, made mud, and spread it over his eyes, then told him to go wash at the nearby spring, and after doing this, he received his sight! Not knowing how to deal with such an event, and since the man had been healed on the sabbath, the people took him to the Pharisees, who had him repeat what had happened. The man called Jesus a prophet, but the Pharisees doubted that a man of God would not observe the sabbath laws. Unsure what or who to believe, the Pharisees then questioned the man’s parents. But afraid of being put out of the synagogue, they said their son was old enough to answer for himself. So, the Pharisees questioned the man all over again, saying, “We know that God does not listen to sinners.” And did you hear, the man with new sight caught them up short, saying, “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” Then out of frustration, embarrassment, or fear that their authority was in question, the Pharisees drove the poor man out of town!

Well, although you and I know that this story of Jesus healing the man born blind is one of God's amazing grace, the immediate reaction by those present, and by the religious authorities as well, was to question what happened - who was involved, how did this take place, and who and what was to be believed? Perhaps this is much like how you or I would normally respond. Even more so today than 2,000 years ago, we tend to look for a logical, if not scientific explanation. With a little more research, we would hope to diagnose what happened, document it, find out how to repeat the outcome, and maybe even discover a way to capitalize on it!

Yet, none of these questions or concerns were of much importance to the man born blind. What mattered to him was that he could now see; his life would be forever changed! But what may not have been apparent is that the real miracle was not so much the giving of eye-sight, rather what happened afterwards. As mentioned already, this healing was one of several signs carried out by Jesus that were recorded in John's gospel, the first being the changing of water into wine, followed by the healing of an official's son, then the cure of the man who was lame, feeding the five thousand, and some would include Jesus' walking on water. Yet signs, as we know, point to something beyond themselves, something to come, something to watch for, or to expect. Much like a caution light signals a possible danger ahead, or a road sign might point to a curve in the road, or flashing red and blue lights might indicate an emergency, the signs of Jesus pointed to something beyond our worldly knowledge and experience. But we will have to read on in John's gospel story for this Sunday to fully appreciate this sign's true meaning and significance. No, it was not enough that the man born blind was physically given his sight.

Most of us who have always been able to see, remain blind to much in the world around us. Take a moment and recall when you could first see that which was not visible to you before? Perhaps it was when you learned to recognize different trees or plants in your yard or the forest, or experimented with mixing primary colors of paint to make all the colors of the rainbow, or learned the different shapes of clouds in the sky and what they indicate about the weather. On a whole other level, as one raised in the deep south, I can remember learning how blind I had been to racial prejudice and injustice. Bathrooms and water fountains marked as “white” and “colored” were just a part the culture. I can also remember first seeing the hatred toward those who wanted change, who sought civil rights for themselves or others. Seeing a large cross burning in a field across from where my family lived, and men in white robes gathered around, was a vivid awakening to that which I had not seen and did not understand, to which I was naive.

The prophet Samuel’s call by God to search for a king to replace Saul as ruler over the Israelites, reminds those of us who can physically see quite well, how blind we can be to what God alone sees and seeks so perfectly. Having traveled to Bethlehem and invited Jesse and his sons to a sacrifice as God directed, Samuel quickly sized up Jesse’s first son, Eliab, as surely the one God would anoint. But God 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.” After seven of Jesse’s sons had passed before Samuel, any of whom Samuel might have chosen, God was still not satisfied. It wasn’t until Samuel asked if there was yet another son, and the youngest son, David, was brought in from tending sheep in the fields, that God said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” And, “... the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.”

So now continuing with the story in John's gospel, having learned that the man he had healed was driven out of town, Jesus found him and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man responded that he did not know who he was, and for Jesus to tell him, "so that I might believe in him." Jesus replied, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." To this the man exclaimed, "Lord, I believe!" This, my brothers and sisters, is the real miracle in today's story. Yes, the man born blind had had his eyes opened, but still he could not see fully. He was not able to see that toward which the sign of healing pointed - that Jesus is not only a healer and prophet, he is the Son of Man, the Messiah, the Christ, a light to the world. It is only after his second encounter with Jesus, and hearing his words, that the man who could now see, could see fully God's love and presence!

The theme of darkness and light is found throughout John's gospel, and indeed in all of scripture, beginning with the creation of light by God in Genesis, and then in the prologue of John, which states: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things came into being through him...What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Lent, which means lengthen, is the season when the days grow longer and we can see a little more each day. Lent is also the season in which, through our Lenten disciplines, we seek to grow as children of the light. In the words of one of my favorite hymns, "I want to walk as a child of the light, I want to follow Jesus...In him there is no darkness at all. The night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God. Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus."

To walk as a child of the light is more than basking in the sunshine of our Lord, it is to be that light. It is to live with the eyes and vision of Christ. As the author of

Ephesians wrote: “Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as Children of the light - for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.” How do we, who may have remained blind so long, do this? As Samuel before us, we listen for God to lead and guide us. As the man born blind and now could see, we ask of the one who heals us to teach us and show us the way. As the writer of Ephesians instructed, we must “Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord,” and “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

As children of the light, where there is despair, we must shine hope. Where there is loneliness, hurt, and isolation, we must cast a beacon of love. Where there is helplessness, we must offer visible compassion and aid. Where there is injustice, we must highlight the need for fairness and equity. Where there is sickness, we must open the doors to healing for all. Where there is hunger and poverty, we must spotlight the ability to share out of our abundance freely and justly. Where there is war and conflict, we must expose ways for peace and reconciliation.

When on a mission trip to Tanzania a few years ago, my wife, Patricia, and I visited an eye clinic in a very rural community. It was begun by Sister Sarah, a nurse, who saw a need, and rather than turn a blind eye, actively sought to address it. Eventually doctors were recruited to come quarterly during the year to help with eye diseases, lens corrections, and even provide surgery for cataracts! People came from miles away and camped at the door of the clinic until they could be seen by a doctor. Those who were blind were led there over all kinds of terrain by a friend or relative, each holding on to one end of a stick. Miraculously, at this remote clinic they were given not only new eye-sight, but also new hope, and new purpose, and new vision.

Yes, “Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.” But, let us not forget that we remain lost and we blind until we can see with the eyes of God, until we are the light of Christ in the world, and until we can all look upon the Son of Man with our own eyes and say, “Lord, I believe!”!