

2017—03—26_Sermon
Opening Our Eyes to Jesus
John 9:1-41

There is a spiritual song which has been around for awhile which starts with these words.

“Open our eyes Lord. We want to see Jesus.”

It's one of those songs which make us feel good when we sing it, but have you ever stopped to consider the implications of this petition? What would be the impact on our lives of really seeing Jesus? What would it mean to have His clear presence and availability for guidance? It would certainly get us out of our business as usual mode of plodding along by wits and instinct.

How would we come to see Jesus in our daily routines? Would it be a constant mountaintop vision—a sort of continual transfiguration? Probably not.

If that were the case, we would probably follow Peter's inclination and build a shrine honoring the vision of Jesus and never move on with our lives.

The fact is that we are meant to see Jesus in the "daily-ness" of our lives as we interact with people and experience the stresses of pain and joy. Although there may be a few dramatic moments of discovery along the way, the opening of our eyes to Jesus is a life-long journey of healing our spiritual blindness. All of us are in this process of healing.

The fact is, we are all born spiritually blind. We do not come into this world blessed with spiritual insight. Just as we are conceived in the physical darkness of the womb, we also begin in spiritual darkness.

Our physical growth from birth onward is characterized by increased sensitivity to light. We progressively encounter various vehicles of light such as the sun and manufactured light fixtures.

We become aware of the distinctions of color and the moods created by different intensities of light. More and more, we appreciate the value of light in our lives. In fact, we cannot live without light because light enables nourishment and growth.

We discover these same facts also in the spiritual realm as we become aware of a greater reality beyond ourselves. This is what happened to the man born blind—the central figure in today’s Gospel.

Today’s Gospel is about two spiritual journeys of growth. One is toward seeing the light. The other moves toward increasing blindness.

Jesus Himself sets the theme of today’s Gospel when He declares Himself the Light of the World—the source from whom everything positive flows—love, creative power, forgiveness, and redemption.

We either draw closer to Jesus and gain greater sight of these realities, or we move away from Jesus into increasing blindness and spiritual darkness. Jesus uses the physical healing of a blind man as a sign of a much greater purpose—to present Himself to be accepted or rejected as the Light of the World.

Jesus came into a world encompassed by the darkness of blindness. Human sin was accepted as normal behavior. People were desensitized to the breaking of every one of the Ten Commandments. It no longer shocked anybody that human life was treated so cheaply.

This Gospel tells us that our world reacts in one of two ways to the coming of Jesus. Some are healed of spiritual blindness and come to greater awareness and acceptance of who Jesus is. That was the experience of the blind man. Others became even more blind and set in their assumptions about the way life is. Those were the Pharisees.

Spiritual blindness is hard to recognize. We fall into a pattern of complacency—of accepting the way things are. What feeds this complacency?

One of my commentators says that it is a matter of conditioning. Do we believe the media ads which project an image of the “good life” consisting in the abundance of the things we have, or do we believe in the old General Confession in the 1928 Prayer Book which says that “there is no health in us?” Which is a more accurate description of life as it is?

Our spiritual blindness increases when we are too easily satisfied aiming at goals which end with our deaths. Healing of that spiritual blindness begins with our dissatisfaction with the way things are going in our lives.

When we recognize our inability to be the all knowing provider trying to meet everyone's needs, when we recognize our false posturing to make ourselves always look good, when we become uncomfortable with our comforts, the journey toward spiritual sight begins in earnest.

What are some of the landmarks on that journey? First, we begin to see God's Kingdom as a reality coming to fruition in this world. This Kingdom is based on a bond of faith and obedience being forged between God and us. That bond was established by the coming of God as a human being who was named Jesus of Nazareth. His perfect offering on the cross was done in perfect faith and obedience—something no human being has done before or since. It enabled you and me to become intimate with God once again—in fact, to see beyond the perfect demands of His Law (which Jesus

satisfied) into His very heart, which is passionately in love with us.

What does our perception of this Kingdom landmark mean for us? It means the discovery of the real treasures of life—forgiveness, acceptance, and an identity grounded in the God who loves us.

Another landmark we perceive on the way to seeing is the presence of Jesus in the lives of those who need our help. We become engulfed in a rising tide of compassion centered not on our feelings, but on a response to the presence of Jesus within the person needing our help. Matthew 25:35-36 reveals the way we see Jesus in this context.

“I was hungry and you gave ME food.
I was thirsty and you gave ME drink.
I was a stranger and you welcomed ME.
I was naked and you clothed ME.
I was sick and you visited ME.
I was in prison and you came to ME.”

Spiritual sight of Jesus leads to serving Him through a compassionate response to the needs of His people.

We help not because it assuages our guilt or makes us feel good. We help those in need because it serves the Jesus whom we love and who loves us.

I began this sermon with the words of that spiritual song, “Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.” The second line of that song is also significant. “To reach out and touch Him, to say that we love Him.”

That second line reflects the action of Jesus toward that man born in blindness. Like him, we are born in blindness, but Jesus reaches out and touches us with the reality of His sacrifice for us on the cross by which He says, “I love you!” In that love, Jesus takes the stuff of creative life—the dust of the ground—representing our flesh and does a re-creative act of redemption—sending us to the waters of Siloam—which means “sent”—thereby placing you and me

into a sending mode—sent from Him to manifest His compassion to the people around us.

What an adventure this will be, as we become Christ's instrument of opening the eyes of those we touch. For in touching them, we touch Him!

Let us pray.

Lord, open our eyes that we may see the possibilities of responding to your perceived presence. Turn us from the blindness of routine religion to realize the potentialities of seeing you not only in our gathered worship, but also in our daily meetings with the people you created. Give us the joy that the blind man felt in his newly restored sight. Move us away from spiritual blindness into seeing you as the Light of the World—the Source of everything we are and shall be. This prayer we offer in Jesus' name, our Healer and Light-bearer. Amen.