

“Take A Closer Look!”

JOHN 9:1-41

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 30, 2014

Friends, perhaps you have heard about that passenger plane that was flying south from Sacramento to Los Angeles, California, with a scheduled stop in San Francisco. On this particular day that layover was going to be extended an extra 45 minutes. Therefore, the captain invited everyone aboard to get off the plane to stretch their legs, if they so desired. Everyone exited the plane except for a blind man, who had flown on this same flight many times before, whose seeing-eye dog always laid quietly on the floor directly in front of him.

As the captain was exiting the plane, he said to the blind man: “Sir, are you sure you don’t want to stretch your legs a bit?”

“No,” the blind man replied. “But I bet my dog sure would!”

Can’t you just imagine the reaction of all those people standing in that airport gate, when the captain of the plane, fully donned in his captain’s uniform, while also wearing his aviator sunglasses, stepped out into the terminal being led by a seeing-eye dog!?!”

I am sure that everyone there wanted to take a closer look for sure!

One of the great truths that Jesus teaches us repeatedly, concerning our Heavenly Father whom he had come from heaven to reveal to us, is that our God is a God who takes notice of people. He takes notice of those seemingly insignificant people; people who the more powerful and prestigious people of this world might never notice at all. He is a God, Jesus teaches us, who takes notice of every sparrow that falls from heaven. He is a God who is so intimately acquainted with every one of us that he knows to the very hair, how many hairs there are exactly that adorn our heads. He is the God who, like that shepherd, has 100 sheep. When one goes astray; he leaves the 99 behind; he goes out and searches for that lost sheep diligently until he finds it.

Listen to the first verse of our Gospel lesson again today! ***“As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth!” (John 9:1)***

It’s not that other people didn’t see this man through their physical eyes, who was physically sitting there. If he had been blind from birth, he probably had been sitting there in the same spot, day after day, week after week, month after month, for years! Why even Jesus’ disciples, who were not residents of Jerusalem had heard the story about this man many times before; this man who was constantly sitting there like a permanent fixture on the temple grounds.

At first we may not think that we have anything in common with this poor man at all and the horrible predicament which he found himself in; but nothing could be further from the truth. We may not be physically blind the way that this man was, but we are all by nature spiritually blind, until the Holy Spirit of God comes to us in the waters of our Baptism and in the preaching of the Gospel to make us spiritually-sighted so that we may now come to see our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for who he really is too!

And doesn’t St. Paul make this crystal-clear to when he says to us in our epistle lesson today from Ephesians 5: ***“For at one time you were darkness; but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light (for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord!” (Ephesians 5:8-10)***

It wasn't simply his physical blindness that prevented him from seeing Jesus for who he really was, but it was also this man's spiritual blindness as well!

Over and over again, the Bible speaks to us about our spiritual blindness too.

Do you remember when God sent the Prophet Samuel to the house of man named Jesse who was living not far from the town of Bethlehem? God told Samuel to go there and to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the new king for Israel, even though King Saul was still alive. Samuel arrives at Jesse's home and likes what he sees, several of Jesse's strong, handsome, macho sons. But in every instance, God the Holy Spirit told Samuel to pass over every one of those sons. "Do have you anymore sons hanging around here?" Samuel asks Jesse. And yes, his youngest son David, with the reddish complexion was out there tending some sheep in fields, which the Bible tells us also a handsome boy with beautiful eyes. The least imposing figure of them all is the very one whom God the Holy Spirit directs Samuel to anoint as Israel's new king.

You remember what the LORD God said to Samuel on that occasion, don't you?

"For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart!"
(1 Samuel 16:7)

Friends, left to ourselves, there is not a one of us who sees as God sees, or who thinks as God thinks, or who even acts as God's acts.

In Isaiah 55:8-9 the LORD God says, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,"* declares the LORD. *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts!"*

But wasn't this the greatest problem of the Pharisees? Didn't they falsely assume that they knew the heart and mind of God completely? It is not that they were really bad people, as bad people go, from a human perspective, but they were vexed with a horrible sense of self-pride and human arrogance.

And it is obvious that Jesus' disciples had some of this self-pride and human arrogance lurking within them too, as we all do! Why else would they have had the nerve to ask our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ such a self-congratulatory question as: ***"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"*** And Jesus seeks to immediately correct their distorted vision.

Jesus answered, ***"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world!"*** ***Having said these things, Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, 'God and wash in the pool of Siloam!' So went and washed and he came back seeing!"*** (John 9:2-7)

At this point Jesus had given this man the great gift of his physical sight, but unfortunately, at this point, this newly sighted man was still spiritually blind.

After this miracle takes place, everyone, it seems, in the city of Jerusalem wants to take a closer look at this man! "Is this the same man or not!" they want to know! In their uncertainty they cart the man off to the Pharisees, who interrogate him thoroughly! They bring the man's parents in as their number one key witnesses. The parents affirm the identity of their son, but have no clue, they say, as to how he was cured.

When Jesus catches wind of all this that the former blind man was not cast out of the temple, Jesus searches once again until he finds this man. ***“And when Jesus found him, he said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking with you.’”***

And just like the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in Sychar that we read about last Sunday in John chapter 4, this man is brought to faith in Jesus too! The former blind man says to our Lord, “Lord, I believe” and John tells us, “He worshiped him!”

Why is “Amazing Grace” such a favorite hymn of so many Christian people?

Its very author for years was a man named John Newton, who was an Englishman that operated a very lucrative slave trading business off the coast of Africa. One day, however, God spoke to his heart and convinced him, however, that what he was doing was not only inhumane but also immoral. He confessed to the Lord. He saw these former victims of his tyranny in a whole new life. He repeated and his writing out of his own personal experience, when he writes: “Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch, like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see!” (LSB 744:1)

Friends, Jesus closes this Gospel Lesson today, with what I believe are some of his most challenging words that are recorded for us anywhere in the New Testament Gospels. Jesus said, ***“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”***

What kind of judgment could Jesus possibly, be talking to us about here? For six chapters earlier, John told us, ***“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him!” (John 3:17).***

JESUS WASN’T SPEAKING HERE ABOUT THE JUDGMENT THAT WAS GOING TO BE BROUGHT UPON HIM, BUT THE JUDGMENT HE, THROUGH HIS PERFECT LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION, WAS NOW GOING TO BRING UPON SIN, DEATH, AND SATAN. NO LONGER WOULD THESE THREE GREAT ENEMIES OF OUR FAITH HAVE THE POWER EVER AGAIN TO KEEP US ETERNALLY SEPARATED FROM OUR GOD! Here Jesus is speaking to us in the same way that he speaks to his disciples in that Upper Room in Jerusalem on the night before he was crucified: ***“Now is the judgment of this world and now shall the ruler of this world be cast out! And I when I am lifted up will draw all people to myself!”(John 12:31-32)***

On that same day when Jesus pronounced his judgment on sin, death, and Satan, he went on to say something else of great significance too. Our Lord said, ***“The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you might become children of the light!” (John 12:35-36)***

Friends, I’d like to think that once my spiritual vision has been restored, that my spiritual vision could never be distorted again. But that’s not what God tells me in that Old Testament today. I believe that Isaiah is talking about the coming Messiah, when he writes in a favorable way: “Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I will send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the Lord? He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness’ sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious!”

“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind!” (John 9:39)

I can't think of any greater example of those people who thought they were seeing everything correctly, but were in fact blind, than that of the Apostle Paul himself prior to his conversion on the Road to Damascus that day (Acts 9). Paul thought he had God all figured out. Paul prided himself in the confidence he says he formerly had in the flesh; ***“circumcised on the eight day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless—but Paul came to one day regard all of those as nothing more than mere rubbish.***

You know what Paul says: “Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection of the dead!” (Philippians 3:4-10)

As we prepare to celebrate the Paschal Feast once again on Easter Sunday, let's confess unto God all those times when we believe we can see, but in fact are blind, and become blind to all attempts at self-righteousness that we might see the light of God's grace revealed to all in Jesus Christ. ***“For it is the God who said ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!” (2 Cor. 4:6)***