

**Saturday March 22, 2020 Morning Prayer John 9: 1-42 Rev. Beth Hewson
St. John the Divine Anglican Church, North Bay.**

Gracious and loving God may the words of my mouth and the meditation of heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

I don't know if you have ever experienced a situation where you are looking at a person and something about them feels familiar but you cannot place them. And later when you do place you find out how important they are to you.

A number of years ago my siblings got together for Easter. In the breakfast room of the hotel, I and another lady were getting breakfast. Her back was to me but the two of us silently moved around each other like a dance— getting our coffee and toast. And deep down there was something familiar about this dance.

Then I went to sit down at the table and this lady turned up at the table and in a huffy exasperated tone said...*well could I join you?* I looked up and it was my sister. She has lost a lot of weight and had a new haircut! I had not recognized her. Just a little embarrassed.

Today's Gospel is about vision. It is a rich and wonderful passage of Jesus restoring a blind man's sight and the blind man for the first time seeing who his healer really was. The author of the Gospel of John tells this story that has elements of hostility, denial, love and grace. Let's take a minute to look at it.

It is Jesus who first notices the man who has been blind since birth. Likely the blind man has been sitting nearby the warm, healing baths day after day hoping and waiting for someone to help him to the pool. After some discussion with his disciples that the man is not blind because of some sin he or his family committed – a common belief of the time. Jesus says,

“No, he is blind so that God's work might be revealed in him” (3)

With a sense of immediacy Jesus made a mud compress with his saliva and placed it on the man's eyes. He instructed the man to

“Go wash in the pool of Siloam”.

When the man returned he could see. And that is when things went sideways.

It began with his neighbors. Essentially no one believed this was the same blind man they had known for years. They were insistent that this was another person.

His parents out of fear of the Pharisees left their son to fend for himself **“Ask him, they said, he is of age. He will speak for himself.”**

And the Pharisees interrogated him relentlessly. How were you healed? What kind of man heals on a Sabbath defiling Moses commandments? Where is this healer?

Twice the man repeated his story to the Pharisees and answered all their questions. Each time they heard the story, the facts of the healing –spit, mud and water – their interest and focus turned immediately to the healer. Who was this man? Pharisees became adamant, nearly strident and fearful about Jesus.

“We know that this man is a sinner....we are disciples of Moses ...but as for this man we do not know where he comes from.”

With no satisfactory answers, they concluded the man and the healer were sinners and certainly the healer was not of God.

An interesting thing happened...as the man repeated his story over and over again of what had happened to him, it was in his heart he began to see who Jesus was. As he gained clarity and insight and the tables turned.

No longer was he uncertain or fearful like his parents and neighbors. He confronted the authorities with their contradictions. Let’s listen to him...He is sure, certain and confident.

“Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.”³¹

We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.³²

Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

It is in the retelling of the story, the blind man’s understanding of who Jesus was changed. At first the blind man simply described our Lord as “the man called Jesus”. Later he called him a prophet. Finally he came to see with his eyes and heart that Jesus who had given him sight was indeed the Son of Man. His heartfelt words, **“Lord I believe”** confirmed his faith in Jesus.

The blind man can see Jesus’ healing for what it means and this kind of sight has little to do with human eye. God does not see or look as people do.

In the O.T. reading the Lord affirms this point to Samuel

“The LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

Samuel experiences the Lord passing over seven of Jesse’s sons – each he thought might be a fine king. However, the one who was anointed as the next King of Israel was the son forgotten, dismissed and ignored, the one tending the sheep in the field far from the house.

True spiritual vision begins in the heart and not the eyes. And if we pause is that not where true faith begins...in our hearts.

As we tell our stories our own blindness to Jesus may become known to us. We become aware of our encounters with Jesus. As we look deeply at the journey of our lives, the people, the places, and more currently our reactions to the Covid 19 pandemic, we see how these events have shaped us.

We are in uncertain times, that is a fact. As the abnormal becomes the normal following the news on Covid -19. This may be a Lenten opportunity where we carve out a time regularly to see where Jesus has touched us.

Take the time during Lent, to describe the encounter(s) with Jesus, write it down, chat with a friend on the phone or some social media forum and share those profound, God filled moments. We may see again or maybe for the first time that an encounter with Jesus has changed our lives and like the blind man our lives are changed forever.

A well known theologian writes that in an encounter with Jesus, it is a grace given to us by God. It is something that makes us feel excited, even a bit joyful.

It is more than mere enthusiasm for an incredible moment. It is something deeper. It is an interior experience, an experience of the heart of encountering the living Jesus and thinking that this is not possible. But God helps us understand that it is the reality and it is wonderful.

It is an experience that leaves its mark on our soul and brings us peace. A peace that cannot be lost, because it is not ours, it belongs to God. It is a peace that cannot be bought or sold.

It is a peace that continues to open our hearts to the marvelous light of Jesus. A light that reveals to each of us and each other that Jesus continues and always will be the light of the world. Amen

