

The readings for Lent Four are all about seeing things as God sees them. Samuel learns that God does not look on the outside, but on the inside. And a young man blind from birth learns that physical seeing is wonderful, but spiritual seeing is crucial. And I couldn't help but sing a couple of bars of "There are none so blind, as those who will not see". Looking at each of the characters in our Gospel reading can, I think, bring some more light to all of us.

The disciples are the first to seek some truth in this Gospel. They are folks who ask questions, absolutely nothing wrong with that. They came across the blind man and asked Jesus "Why did this happen? Was it his own sins or the sins of his parents that cased it?" Jesus settles that issue by saying "**Neither**". That's the end of that. How imagine yourself BEING the young man they've come across who is blind. How would like hearing those questions? Imagine how different it would have been if the first question they asked Jesus was "How can we help this man? Would you please help this man?" Asking questions is great. Learning to ask the RIGHT QUESTIONS is much better.

After Jesus has healed the man, we get to hear his neighbours. They cannot believe their eyes. It was simply impossible for a man born blind to see, so therefore this fellow must just look like their friend. The neighbours insisted upon **a satisfactory explanation** for this wonderful mystery. Moving past skepticism to simply "seeing" the miracle right in front of them would have been so much better.

Then there are the Pharisees. Believers in God to be sure. Schooled in the Scriptures to be sure. What was their obstacle to rejoicing in this healing? Their **strength had become their weakness**. Seeing only the Law blinded them to Grace. Jesus had mixed up some clay and healed on the

Sabbath. This represented work. Therefore, Jesus could not be of God because He broke the Sabbath law. If they believed, they would have to allow that the law could, in some instances, be wrong; be broken without sin. This was just not acceptable to them. After much questioning, they tossed the once blind man, now seeing, right out of the synagogue. The God of the Pharisees had been put in a box. The God of the Pharisees didn't do things the way they thought He should. Their best intended expectations blinded them to the truth. They lived in black and white and had not discovered that when blended, they produce gray.

The reaction of the parents is also very telling. They knew their son. They knew he was born blind. They knew he now could see. And they knew that Jesus was the One who had healed him. But they hedged. Why? Because they **were afraid**. They would not commit to telling the truth, but passed the buck along to their son. Expulsion from the synagogue and loss of face in their community held them back. Fear often defeats courage. Fear can leave the helpless without comfort or support. Perfect love casts out fear, but fear can render even parental love imperfect.

Finally, there is the blind man. He believed Jesus enough to do what he was told to do, and he went and washed. He saw. How incredibly marvelous it must have been for him. Unlike his parents, he attributes the miracle to Jesus. He doesn't yet understand exactly who Jesus is, but he knows enough to be able to say "Once I was blind, now I see...and Jesus did it." **He spoke out the truth that he knew.** And for this, he was expelled, thrown out, turned away...cast out of the synagogue.

Let's summarize. **The obstacles to spiritual sight and understanding we've seen so far are: asking the wrong questions, rationalizing the answers, skepticism, putting God in a box, and fear.**

There is one more obstacle not mentioned in our Gospel but important to note. Jesus Himself told us that people **preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil**. People sometimes flee from God because they know that seeing and believing will result in changes in their lives. Changes they don't want to make. These are the things that keep people from seeing. So **what** brings Light? It's a **who**, and the who is Jesus. Let's watch Him in action!

We begin with the young man sitting all alone, tossed out, rejected by the very people who should be rejoicing with him. Marveling at being able to see and somewhat dizzy with the newness of it. Left to his own devices even by his parents. Have you ever felt that way? None of us have been healed instantly of blindness, but lots of us have felt like outcasts, abandoned by those we were counting on, rejected by folks we had been trying to bless. Alone and confused and in the dark about it all. What happens next to that young man is the perfect portrait of the generosity of the grace of Jesus.

Jesus hears what has happened to the young man. He doesn't just shrug His shoulders and say "Oh those nasty Pharisees!" He gets up and goes out and hunts until He finds him. Then Jesus sits down alone with the man, and leads him into understanding the very truth he needs to know. The truth that the One who has healed him is the Messiah, the beloved of the Father, that the One who has come to redeem Israel and the world is the very One who has now come to find him. Wow! Not only has this young man been given physical sight, he has been given spiritual sight and both his eyes and his soul are now aglow with it. Why? Because Jesus loved him and would stop at nothing to see him set free. Here is the Good News for us. Jesus will do the same for you and for me and for anyone who has been cast

out by the forces of fear, intolerance, malicious gossip, or just plain evil...Jesus will come and speak truth to us. Why? Because He loves us too and will stop at nothing to tell us the truth and set us free.

Now that makes me want to sing Amazing Grace out on the porch steps like we did last Tuesday! “Once I was blind but now I see”. “Now **I** see, but in truth, I need to say **“sort of”**. I see only in part. I am like the young man of our lesson. I still need Jesus to come and tell me more about Himself, to remind me of how Amazing and Gracious He really is. I need Him to help me dig deeper into my own mind and soul and tell me the truth about who I really am, deep down. We all see in part, and we all need Jesus to come to us with truth and compassion, but also with an axe to hack out some of the log jams in our eyes.

“Once we were blind, but now we see.....sort of” There’s much more light to come. Just when we feel most lost, most confused, most alone, Jesus will come and find us. Right where we are. Because you see, He loves us.

Thanksgiving and Praise to the One who defeats the darkness! Amen.