

Lent 4 – Year A

John 9:1-42

March 22, 2020

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sparkling. Beady. Bedroom. Piercing. Shifty. All are adjectives we use to describe people's eyes. Think for a moment how differently you've felt before another person's eyes—how you may have withered under the stare of an angry teacher; how your head may have begun to swim in the dreamy gaze of a lover. How belittled you felt as your boss seemed to look right through you without seeing you. How you could have burst with joy in the proud eyes of your parents. Or, how solemn you became on Friday as our governor delivered, eye-to-eye through the camera lens to all New Yorkers, the gripping news of the “stay at home” order across the state, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are affected by the eyes that look upon us. Sometimes it can make all the difference in the world!

We hear about one of those times in our gospel story this morning. Today's particular story is a miracle story. Jesus sees a blind man who has been blind from birth and heals him. In contrast to the other Gospel writers of Matthew, Mark, and Luke where the miracles of Jesus often require faith on the part of the one being healed, in John's gospel Jesus takes the initiative as he goes to the blind man and heals him, requiring no faith whatsoever on the part of the man.

Earlier in his writing, John lets us know that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”, the One “who became the Word made flesh”, is doing the work of creation. Much as God in Genesis lights up the night with a moon and stars, Jesus restores light to that blind man, and just as God in Genesis takes dirt and molds it into human life, Jesus takes spit-watered mud and creates a new life for this man born blind.

Wouldn't you think a joyful celebration would follow? Actually, quite the opposite happens as the other people in the story simply refuse to acknowledge what they can plainly see with their own perfectly functional eyes! The DISCIPLES look at the blind beggar man with distorted vision formed by the popular belief that suffering is caused by sin and he got what he deserved. The NEIGHBORS look, but can't see past the image of the way things had always been, a blind man sitting and begging. The PHARISEES' eyes have grown dim, as they have been clouded over with the desire for power and control, rules, and the boundaries of their faith. The eyes of the man's own PARENTS are squinting as they fear being thrown out of their faith community, denying what is right before their eyes. They all fail to see that God is doing a new thing in Jesus, the light of the world.

At some point in our lives, we have all been most likely blind to seeing Jesus at work in our midst. Especially now, in the midst of these uncertain and very scary times, I bet we can all identify with the blind man's parents, as we want to cover or close our eyes to what this global pandemic is causing all around us—in the world, in our country, in our communities, and in our own families. Fears of loved ones, or ourselves, contracting the potentially-deadly virus;

fears of overwhelming our health systems to the point that they break down; fears of the resulting economic instability we will face as millions of Americans—maybe even ourselves—find that we are suddenly without work. Fear has the power to create tunnel vision.

But, we know that there is a power stronger than fear, and that is the power of LOVE. We hear stories such as today's where the power of God's love made manifest in Jesus Christ is the power that gives light, sight, and truth to us. God looks upon His creation so lovingly that God sent His only Son, Jesus, into this world to save it and to save us. The only way that could happen was by His very Son going to the cross and dying for us, overcoming our greatest enemy, death, in doing so.

Back to the story: After the neighbors desert the once-blind man, and both the religious authorities and parents fail him, he is thrown out of his community. Who goes, looks for, and finds this now-sighted man? JESUS! And, when this man, given new life, recognizes that Jesus is the One who healed him, he falls down and worships the One who has banished the darkness, saying nothing other than "Lord, I believe."

Today's gospel story is a terrific reminder that Jesus STILL sees us with his compassionate, merciful, and loving eyes and comes to find us after we, too, have been figuratively thrown OUT of our community and INTO the confines of our homes as a way to protect ourselves and our neighbors. Jesus sees the hurt, pain and brokenness in our eyes, and promises to be with us. He is with us as our government leaders address and work intently on alleviating the health and economic stress; as medical professionals feverishly work for treatment and ultimately a vaccine; as you and I reach out to each other through phone, email, and text communication. He is with us as we take walks in the great outdoors; as we clean out cabinets and closets at home; as we watch movies with our spouses. He is with us as we read scripture and the daily Lenten devotions; in our prayers we offer on behalf of others and ourselves; in the quiet time, as we listen for His still, small voice offering care and comfort to our weary souls.

Once we see Jesus, we see the eyes of God looking back at us, eyes affirming our infinite worth of being now and forever God's beloved children through baptism. Through the Holy Spirit, the great ophthalmologist, God, has performed corrective eye surgery on us as God has fitted us with contact lenses that have the same prescription. We can then see what is right in front of our eyes—the hungry, the homeless, the displaced, the marginalized, the fearful—as God sees them, and respond with humility, compassion, empathy, tolerance, and acceptance.

May the words of Amy Grant, in her song entitled "My Father's Eyes" also be ours: "She had her Father's eyes, Her Father's eyes: Eyes that found the good in things, when good was not around; Eyes that found the source of help, when help would not be found; Eyes full of compassion, seeing every pain; Knowing what you're going through, and feeling it the same. Just like my Father's eyes." Our loving Father sees us this very day and every day. Amen.