

March 22, 2020 Fourth Sunday of Lent

Lord, heal my blindness!

1Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a Psalm 23:1-6 Ephesians 5:8-14 John 9:1-41

In the first reading the prophet Samuel is given instructions by the Lord to go to Jesse and anoint one of his sons to be the future king of Israel. Left to his own Samuel would have probably chosen incorrectly by judging strictly on appearances. The Lord always looks deeper, into the heart, to see the inner person. Samuel is surprised that David is the chosen one.

The prayer of the Psalmist indicates gratefulness to the Lord who is imaged as Shepherd, the One who guides us in right paths, who refreshes us and blesses us so often. It is this constant blessing, which brings goodness and kindness into our lives; it brings encouragement in difficult situations.

In the second reading Paul images the Ephesians as children of light brought out of the darkness. Now all must live in ways that reflect goodness, justice, and truth. This calls for correct judgment which comes through the light given by Jesus Christ and the Gentiles who were once darkness itself, are now they are children of light.

In the Gospel Jesus meets the man born blind and heals him. This man, in turn, sees the light of day for the first time and becomes a powerful witness and points to Jesus as healer and prophet and makes it clear to unbelieving religious leaders that Jesus is someone sent by God. Jesus says he has come to make the sightless see and the seeing blind. Some Pharisees take offense at the implication but Jesus makes it clear that those who claim to see should understand what comes from God.

The Father lives in unapproachable Light;
The Son is the Light of the world,
The Holy Spirit is our guiding Light.

The importance of light in our lives can be symbolized in the first moments of an electrical blackout when visibility vanishes from sight. For the man born blind there was an opposite effect for he was always in darkness and all of a sudden there was this whiteout, this new light of the world that entered his life. There is a deeper seeing in John's writings that have meaning on more than just one level. So, while Jesus' words are taken literally, he often speaks metaphorically so that physical light is a metaphor for spiritual insight. Even the holy prophet Samuel came to realize that true value involves more than just physical observation. Consider those around you you may have one view of them but what is God's precious view of them?

When the blind man was healed it was a sign of Christ at work in the world for those who could not believe; eyes were opened to the height and depth of God's love for them. It is not difficult to imagine a terrifying physical world without light but how many are concerned about living in spiritual darkness? The blind man testified to stubborn religious leaders of the time since they still didn't see that it is Jesus who brings the believers into his kingdom of light.

Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead and Christ will give you light. (Ephesians 5:14)

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Seeing, Hearing, Understanding

The main passages of seeing, hearing, and understanding arise in interesting contexts. The prophets are continually dealing with people who are obstinate and corrupt and God's words direct their spiritual senses to be completely dulled.

In the call of Isaiah, the voice of the Lord informs him of his mission:¹

Go and say to this people: Listen carefully, but you shall not understand! Look intently, but you shall know nothing!

You are to make the heart of this people sluggish, to dull their ears and close their eyes; Else their eyes will see, their ears hear, their heart understands, and they will turn and be healed.

The people hesitate and remain impenitent, so their obstinacy is merely occasioned by the prophet's warning, but not necessarily caused by it. Jesus referred to this same passage when he told his disciples:

*This is why I speak to them in parables, because 'they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand.' Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says: 'You shall indeed hear but not understand you shall indeed look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and be converted, and I heal them.'*²

Paul, blinded by the light of Christ in his conversion experience had a mission of opening the eyes of those he was sent to, and to turn them from darkness to light.³ In Rome, he preached without success, to some prominent men of the community:

*Without reaching any agreement among themselves they began to leave; then Paul made one final statement. "Well did the Holy Spirit speak to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah, saying: 'Go to this people and say: You shall indeed hear but not understand. You shall indeed look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people; they will not hear with their ears; they have closed their eyes, so they may not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and be converted, and I heal them.'*⁴

These three passages concerning seeing, hearing and understanding comprise a message in Trinitarian triplicate and this underscores their importance. God the Father speaks through Isaiah, Jesus, Son of the Father, relates to it, and Paul indicates the Holy Spirit is also involved. The phrase, "else they will be healed" needs the broad interpretation of "else they will be saved," rather than a narrow view of physical healing.

¹ Isaiah 6:1-11

² Matthew 13:13-15

³ Acts 26:18

⁴ Acts 28:25-27

Leonardo da Vinci said:

“There are three classes of people:

those who see.

Those who see when they are shown.

Those who do not see.”

Which type are you?

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