

Westminster Sermon – “God’s Eye”

Scripture Readings – I Samuel 16:7-13, John 9 (selected verses)

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In our first scripture reading, I Samuel 16, we are reminded that God does not see as we see. The past can be hard to leave behind. Samuel lingers in his grief over the disappointment of Saul’s kingship, and yet God sends him on a mission to anoint a new king. Samuel fears for his life ‘What if Saul finds out?’ but trusts that God will provide what Samuel cannot yet see. Jesse and his sons are invited to accompany Samuel to make a sacrifice so that a king can be chosen from among them. Samuel’s expectations about who God’s sees as the next king fall into the cultural norms of importance, inheritance, and power. Looking through God’s eyes, the expected order is reversed. Hear now, God’s Holy word beginning at verse 7.

7 But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him, for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” 9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” 10 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.” 11 Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him, for we will not sit down until he comes here.” 12 He sent and brought David in. Now David was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. The LORD said, “Rise and anoint him, for this is the one.” 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah. Amen.

As we continue our journey toward Jerusalem, we do so through the eyes of the youngest disciple John. Written at the end of the first century, John’s gospel reflects some of the heightened tensions between the Jewish leaders and the followers of Jesus, the “people of the way,” who have been driven out of the synagogue. John records real events in Jesus’ life, which are interpreted around a theme or metaphor. Last week the theme was water. This morning’s theme of “light” is developed around the story of Jesus healing a blind man. As the drama of John 9 unfolds before our very eyes in seven scenes, we see the irony of a blind man who when given sight sees people who prove themselves to be spiritually blind. Hear now the word of God.

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. 4 We must work the works of the One who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 6 When Jesus had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, 7 saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. (pause)

John 9 continues with interactions of how the community responds. The neighbors ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” They are confused and bewildered. Some are disbelieving. The Pharisees quickly become divided over the healing. Some object that Jesus performed the miracle on the Sabbath—kneading his saliva with mud was considered work and strictly forbidden.

The synagogue leaders confront the man’s parents who are clearly uncomfortable with the questioning. Afraid they may say something that will be used against them and not wanting to be caught in a religious debate, they tell them to ask their son, who is of age. When the healed man is asked again by the synagogue leaders, he speaks from his heart, challenges their assumptions, and offends them. They remind him he was born in sin and drive him out of the synagogue. Jesus comes to the healed man again and reveals who Jesus is to him. Today’s reading ends with this powerful interaction and affirmation of faith.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when Jesus found him Jesus said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” ³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe.” And worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.” Amen.

The title of the sermon: “God’s Eye”

The text: “*God does not see as mortals see.*” *1 Samuel 16:9a*

Let us pray. Loving God, give us eyes that are open to see and celebrate your spirit working in our midst. May the words of my mouth and meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

I have brought a “God’s Eye,” created by our Bridges children this week. The Ojo de Dios, or God’s Eye, is a simple weaving made across two sticks. It is believed that the Huichol people of Jalisco, Mexico made the first “God’s Eye.” When a child was born, the father would weave the central “God’s Eye,” then a color would be added every year of the child’s life until age five to remind the family that God is keeping a protective eye over their son or daughter.

Although the design could symbolize the cross in our Christian faith, for those who originally created it, the four arms represent the four elements of the world: earth, wind, fire, and water. “God’s eye” is a reminder to people of all faiths that God is watching over us. Today’s scripture from First Samuel reminds us that God does not see as we see, and so this simple craft also challenges us to open our eyes that we may see the world through the eyes of God.

In John’s gospel, what began as a simple act of compassion and healing on the part of Jesus became more complicated than anyone could have foreseen. Before we take a closer look at the hidden meaning in this unfolding drama, let us not overlook the impact of this miracle, which changed a man’s life.

No one can underestimate the importance of sight. Medical science has come a long way with the treatment of visual loss. We are grateful for the ophthalmologists, optometrists and nurses who coordinate the care of our eyes today. However, there are those among us who still live with visual loss. Their courage and strength to live lives that are rich and grace-filled inspires those of us who often take our vision for granted.

Jesus does more than heal this man. He also teaches about the relationship between illness and sin. The question “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?” reflects the Judaic teaching of the day and still a simplistic, short-sighted way of thinking in our own time. Jesus’ response clearly denies a relationship between sin and this man’s blindness. “Neither” Jesus replies, confounding his disciples. We would be wise to see another’s suffering through “God’s eye,” rather than judge or blame, let us view disease and disability as an opportunity to manifest God’s compassion through acts of kindness and mercy.

For the man that Jesus healed all he had known prior to this day was a world of darkness and shadows. He encounters the One we call the “Light of the World,” and, for the first time in his life, he sees the brightness of the sun and the beauty of the world upon which the light shines. For the first time in his life, he sees the faces of his friends, family, and loved ones as well as their expressions and features he must have imagined in his mind a thousand times. He is beside himself with joy!

Unfortunately, the joy of this man is cut short by the controversy that surrounds the healing. The clarity in the faces he sees becomes blurred by the reaction of others to his newfound sight. What the man sees is confusing, disturbing, and more upsetting than the darkness to which he had grown accustomed. Rather than share in the mystery and wonder of it all, those around him feel threatened by the change in the status quo. Everyone, except the one whose life was changed, was more comfortable with the way things were.

The neighbors had grown rather fond of seeing the man beg as they passed him. He was a fixture in their world.

The Pharisees were happier keeping an eye on “who observed the sabbath” and “whose sin caused blindness” than accepting a man who “was blind and now could see.” Jesus threatened their religious authority. Surely, they had the most to lose.

The man’s parents had dealt with their grief long ago and didn’t want to get involved with a controversy in their faith community, and really, who could blame them? “Ask him, he is of age!”

When the synagogue leaders do ask the man, the sad irony of the story comes into focus. Some things never change. The religion that blamed the man for his blindness now blames him for his sight. His reward for answering their questions truthfully was to be driven out of town because his personal experience contradicts the way they see the world.

By this time, one can’t help but think the man has seen enough and longs for the days of status quo when he lived as a blind beggar. At least then he had friends, family, and a community of faith or so he thought. In this man’s darkest hour, totally abandoned by all he once knew and believed, Jesus comes to him again. It is in this defining moment that faith is found. “Lord, I see, and I believe.”

Is this not also our experience? During times of disillusionment when we feel abandoned and alone on our faith journeys, Jesus comes to us and opens our eyes. How many of us have faithfully followed directions and washed in the pool of Siloam, only to discover we, too, are out there on our own? How many of us have discovered the people we thought would always be there for us are not? How many of us have come to realize there is a price to pay for good deeds when they threaten the status quo? How many of us have seen our own personal growth threaten those who are the closest to us?

Faith is the most authentic during these defining and challenging moments in our life with Christ. We see in a new light how little faith has to do with clinging to the status quo or protecting our own structures of power and how much faith has to do with being open to God's spirit working in our midst, even in ways we do not understand. During these moments, we get a glimpse of life through God's eye and see how little faith has to do with arrogance or smug righteousness and how much faith has to do with healing, mercy, and compassion. Thank God for the defining and challenging moments of faith in each of our lives and in our life together.

As we kick-off the Steadfast Neighbor Habitat Build this week, it is good to illuminate how we have come to this place in our life together. During our first service week in August of the 2020 pandemic year, members working in the neighborhood saw, for the first time, what many of us had not seen driving by over the years. They saw the dilapidated home at 626 S. Glenwood and began to dream about buying the property, demolishing the blighted buildings, and opening ourselves to God's spirit and direction. Because of their foresight, the fortitude and faith of many, and the vision of this congregation, we are working together with our neighbors in this defining moment with kindness, compassion, and generosity. May God's eye watch over the house we build together. Amen.