A.M.D.G. 4TH Sunday in Lent – A Texts: 1 Samuel 16: 1-13

 March 26th, 2017 John 9: 1-41

***1 Samuel 16 ……*** The Lord said to Samuel, ‘How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.’ Samuel said, ‘How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.’ And the Lord said, ‘Take a heifer with you, and say, “I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.” Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.’ Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, ‘Do you come peaceably?’ He said, ‘Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.’ And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.’ 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.’ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, ‘Neither has the Lord chosen this one.’ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, ‘Neither has the Lord chosen this one.’ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, ‘The Lord has not chosen any of these.’ 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.’ He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.’ 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.

***John 9: 1-41 …..*** Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?” Jesus said, “You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. As long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world’s Light.” He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man’s eyes, and said, “Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam” (*Siloam means “Sent”*). The man went and washed—and saw.

Soon the town was buzzing. His relatives and those who year after year had seen him as a blind man begging were saying, “Why, isn’t this the man we knew, who sat here and begged?” Others said, “It’s him all right!” But others objected, “It’s not the same man at all. It just looks like him.” He said, “It’s me, the very one.” They said, “How did your eyes get opened?” “A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ I did what he said. When I washed, I saw.”

“So where is he?” “I don’t know.”

They marched the man to the Pharisees. This day when Jesus made the paste and healed his blindness was the Sabbath. The Pharisees grilled him again on how he had come to see. He said, “He put a clay paste on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “Obviously, this man can’t be from God. He doesn’t keep the Sabbath.” Others countered, “How can a bad man do miraculous, God-revealing things like this?” There was a split in their ranks. They came back at the blind man, “You’re the expert. He opened *your* eyes. What do you say about him?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

They didn’t believe it, didn’t believe the man was blind to begin with. So they called the parents of the man now bright-eyed with sight. They asked them, “Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? So how is it that he now sees?” His parents said, “We know he is our son, and we know he was born blind. But we don’t know how he came to see—haven’t a clue about who opened his eyes. Why don’t you ask him? He’s a grown man and can speak for himself.” So they called the man back a second time—the man who had been blind—and told him, “Give credit to God. We know this man is an impostor.” He replied, “I know nothing about that one way or the other. But I know one thing for sure: I was blind . . . I now see.”

They said, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

“I’ve told you over and over and you haven’t listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you so eager to become his disciples?”

And with that they jumped all over him. “*You* might be a disciple of that man, but we’re disciples of Moses. We know for sure that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man even comes from.”

-2-

The man replied, “This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes! It’s well known that God isn’t at the beck and call of sinners, but listens carefully to anyone who lives in reverence and does his will. That someone opened the eyes of a man born blind has never been heard of—ever. If this man didn’t come from God, he wouldn’t be able to do anything.” They said, “You’re nothing but dirt! How dare you take that tone with us!” Then they threw him out in the street.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him. He asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man said, “Point him out to me, sir, so that I can believe in him.” Jesus said, “You’re looking right at him. Don’t you recognize my voice?” “Master, I believe,” the man said, and worshiped him. Jesus then said, “I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind.” Some Pharisees overheard him and said, “Does that mean you’re calling us blind?” Jesus said, “If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you’re accountable for every fault and failure.”

**Was Blind, But Now I See**

If you will indulge me this morning, I would like to begin with two experiments, and invite your participation ….. *(will be shared in church)*

Seeing things from a different perspective is the challenge to us from our scripture texts this morning. In our Hebrew scripture reading from 1 Samuel, chapter 16, God instructs the prophet Samuel to find and anoint a new king to replace Saul – who has strayed from following God. And he is sent to the family of Jesse – a man from Bethlehem, who has 8 sons. So Samuel goes – and one by one the 7 oldest sons are brought before him. They are all strapping lads – strong from all their labours – all seemingly suitable candidates to choose from. But after each one in succession is rejected – God speaks to Samuel: *“Do not look on his appearance – on the height of his stature – for the LORD does not see as humans see. They look on the outward appearance – but God sees the heart.”* *(vs.7)* As it turns out – Jesse has one more son – the youngest of the brothers – still little more than a child. And it is he – David – who ends up being anointed into God’s service- and in doing so, changing the course of Israel’s history. What God sees - and what we see – are often 2 different things, and this scripture challenges us to see not just with our eyes but also with our hearts.

That theme is then picked up again in John’s gospel. In the 9th chapter, John draws us into a story of a man, blind from birth, who has an encounter with Jesus that results in his being able to see for the first time. But for those who had known the man as a blind beggar – the change in his condition is deeply unsettling. They begin to ask questions – first of one another, and then of the man. Is this really the man they have know from the time he was born? How is it, then, that being blind all his life, he now sees? Finally – they take him to the Pharisees – the religious leaders of the day – who start asking questions of their own.

Then they bring in the man’s parents, and ask questions of them – and they, in turn, direct the questioning back to the man:

-3-

\* How were your eyes opened, they ask him?

\* Where is the man who did it?

\* What did he do to you?

\* How did he open your eyes?

\* What do you say about him after your experience?

As the story progresses, there is a palpable sense of mounting tension – an escalation of frustration on the part of the questioners. But the newly-sighted man answers their questions in the only way he knows how – from his own experience. *“One thing I know,” he says, “and that is – once I was blind, but now I see.”*

Isn’t it interesting that not one person says, “*That’s wonderful*!” or even “*Thank God!”.* No one asks the man what it is like to see for the first time, or even whether the light hurts his eyes. All they want to know is – how, who, where and what – and ultimately, whether Jesus should have done what he did by healing on the Sabbath and thereby breaking the rules which forbid all work on that holy day. All of which – of course – misses the point!

The man – stigmatized from birth because of his disability – continues to be victimized as those around him talk about the ‘issue’ – the technicalities of ***how*** he regained his sight – and ignore ***him*** – the person – entirely! In a wonderful little twist of irony at the end of the story – Jesus points to the man as one who, in his blindness, saw more than many of those around him who were not blind.

How easy it would be for us to sit in judgement on the Pharisees – the religious leaders of the day – for their obstinacy and obtuseness! They were even more willing to suggest that the man had *never* been blind – or that it was a different person altogether – than to accept the possibility of what their eyes told them – that he had been given his sight!

Some things never change, however! We don’t have to cast around very far to see that many of us can get caught up in ‘issues’ and ‘problems’ – and forget that there are real people involved. We talk about the ‘refugee ***crisis***’ for example – and sometimes forget that these are people like you and me – often caught up in circumstances beyond their control – just seeking safety and a future. Or we may refer to the Residential School ***problem*** – and forget that for generations, children were forced from their families and culture, and often abused. And that wound remains – and will take generations to heal.

In our story of the blind man – only one really saw and treated him – not as a problem – but as a person of value and dignity – and that was Jesus.

I find it interesting that the word ‘respect’ – actually means ‘*to look again’*. When we respect the basic God-given dignity of others. When we look again – not just at issues and problems or outward appearances – we begin to catch a glimpse of how God looks at us.

-4-

At the beginning of our worship this morning, we sang that beloved old hymn ‘*Amazing Grace’*. John Newton – the composer- was at one time a successful slave trader – seeing the African people only as a commodity to be traded and used – not as human beings with real fears, hopes and dreams. Then one day, Newton looked – really looked – into the eyes of one of his slave cargo – and saw there a human being – a child of God. And his life changed forever. He began to see things in a different way. Years later, he wrote the words to the hymn that continues to touch the hearts of those who sing it:

 *“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound*

 *that saved a wretch like me;*

 *I once was lost, but now am found;*

 *was blind, but now I see.”*

The next time you or I are tempted to judge or dismiss someone too lightly – or to talk only about issues and problems rather than the real people they represent – let us first remember the God who sees beneath the face ***we*** show to the world – to our hearts – to the people we long to be – with all our hopes and dreams and aspirations. And then let us look at one another – eye to eye – as children of God – and see the face of Christ in each one.

Amen – so may it be!