

Texts: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

Maybe the question I asked the children just now is a good one to ask everyone. What do you see around you that lets you know Jesus is here? What do you see that enables you to confess with the blind man in today's Gospel "Lord, I believe."

Seeing is believing, as the saying goes.

But today's Gospel reading is all about the confusion between seeing and believing. For John the Gospel writer, sight doesn't necessarily translate to understanding. There is lots of misunderstanding, lots of people in the story who don't really want to see who Jesus is or what Jesus is doing.

And in the center of this story is a man who was born blind. A man who never in his life saw a flower, a sunrise, the sea, mountains, his parents' faces or the place he called home. Back in Jesus' day, and further back into the time of the Old Testament, it was assumed that if someone had this type of disability, he or she was being punished by God.

So the disciples, as they walk past the blind man, who sits begging by the side of the road, ask Jesus one of those thorny theological questions. "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Back in the first chapter of John's gospel, Jesus called these very same disciples by inviting them to "Come and see." So it is absolutely startling that these same disciples still don't get what it is they are

seeing. For them the man's blindness is a problem. They aren't thinking about their own sinfulness, of course. They are thinking that somehow this man deserved his condition.

I want to stop for a moment to think about that question, "who sinned?" Because the question of who is deserving of what they get has not gone away in our society. Who sinned, that they have to depend on food from the Shepherd's Pantry or Meals on Wheels? Who sinned, that they are barred from immigrating to the United States? Who sinned, that they don't have a job?

For Jesus, the man's blindness is not a problem like it is for his disciples; it is a moment to reveal God's amazing grace. I am the light of the world, he says. Then he mixes dirt and his own saliva into mud, rubs it on the eyes of the blind man and tells him to go and wash. And there in the water of the pool of Siloam, the blind man receives Jesus' gift, the miracle of sight. The true light that enlightens everyone, comes into this man's world of darkness.

In other miracle stories in the New Testament, the person who was healed or restored goes on his or her way rejoicing. Not here. In this story, everyone around the formerly blind man reacts poorly. His neighbors can no longer recognize him because he is no longer the beggar that they knew from the side of the road. The Pharisees are incensed because it was the Sabbath and you are not supposed to do any work on the Sabbath. They condemn Jesus as a sinner, and

berate the healed man, calling him a liar. Even the man's own parents distance themselves from him because their reputation is more important than the fact that their son has just been healed.

Everyone keeps asking this man what happened to him. And he keeps on trying to tell them. Now that he can see, he sees that Jesus is from God. But the Jewish leaders don't see -- they are the ones who are actually blind. The healed man can't explain. All he can do is tell his story. All he can do is witness to the amazing grace that has opened his eyes. "One thing I know -- I was blind, and now I can see," he says. We are going to sing the exact same words in a few minutes. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

What would it be like to see all of a sudden? What would it be like to have light bombard you, to see colors and shapes and not know what they were? What would it be like to be transformed, shaken up, given new sight and new life? What do you see when you see by the light of Christ? There was that life I used to live, and now there is this new life -- the life that I can only receive in gratitude.

Each of us has something of the blind man in us. Perhaps you can tell your own story of suddenly being able to see. Perhaps you can tell a story about an encounter with divine grace, a moment where everything suddenly became clear. Perhaps it happened at a retreat, or at camp, or while you were singing in a worship service,

or while you were praying, or at the bedside of someone you loved.

The light of God's grace comes shining through.

Sometimes that clarity comes in a flash, and sometimes it comes more slowly. Some things we cannot explain. We can only tell our story, the story of something that happened to us. The story of when God's grace rained down on us, along with the man who was born blind: "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

The trouble is, this man's faith community failed him. They got bogged down in arguments. Sometimes the reaction to conversion and belief are judgment and condemnation. The man's openness and his growing faith contrast with the stubborn Pharisees and his fearful neighbors. Can a sinner tell the truth? Can a sinner be a leader? Can a sinner perform a miracle? There are rules about what you can and cannot do on the Sabbath day, and Jesus clearly violated those rules. Can a sinner deserve to be healed? According to the Pharisees, the gift of healing grace came on the wrong day, to an unworthy man, given by someone who is plainly a maverick.

Each of us has something of the Pharisee in us. The person who wants to only play by the rules, to color only inside the lines. Each of us knows what it is like to have those moments of judgment. Each of us wants to decide who deserves mercy and who doesn't.

Each of us wants to define what others can and can't do. Sometimes we ourselves are so blind that we can't see the grace of God raining down in front of us.

And if you get right down to it, each of us is a sinner. Each of us has some place in our own being, in our past, in our personality, that would get us thrown out of the synagogue. Each of us needs to be washed in order to be healed, to be forgiven before we are able to see.

Fortunately, the Gospel story does not end at the door of the synagogue. Jesus goes looking for the man who has received his sight and Jesus finds him. Jesus reveals himself to the man. "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" he asks. "You have seen him and the one speaking to you is he." The light shines on the healed man and enables him to worship, to speak his belief.

The good news is, Jesus comes and finds each one of us, just as he came to find the formerly blind man. It is not a question of whether we, sighted or blind, find Jesus, but of Jesus coming to find us where we are. Jesus shines his light on us and opens our eyes, gives us new sight and new life.

What do you see that that lets you know Jesus is here?

What do you see when you see by the light of Christ?

When you see by the light of Christ, you no longer see some who deserve what they get and others who do not. You see that

every person you meet is a child of God, created in God's image, precious in God's sight.

When you see by the light of Christ, you see opportunities all around you to serve and seek justice for those who are in need -- body, mind and soul.

When you see by the light of Christ, you see abundance instead of scarcity. You see that there is enough for all. Life is no longer about who gets the most stuff, but about how to make sure that everyone has enough.

When you see by the light of Christ, you look at a piece of bread and a cup of wine and you see Jesus himself.

When you see by the light of Christ, you see with your heart, not only your eyes. The light of Christ shines on us in our life together and on our neighbors nearby and far away.

When we see by the light of Christ, we have a vision of new life. We know that we are forgiven and that we can forgive others. We can see the reign of God breaking in on us here in this place, here among us, here and now.

When we see by the light of Christ, we live in hope and faith, not being able to explain everything, but simply being able to say, "One thing I do know. I was blind and now I see. One thing I do know: I was lost and now am found. One thing I do know: He was dead and now he is risen."