

Light in the Darkness

I Samuel 16:1-13; John 9: 1-41

Lent 4A St Thomas's Church 2017

SING:

Walk in the light, beautiful light
walk where the dewdrops of mercy shine bright
shine all around us by day and by night
Jesus, the light of the world.

The man wanted to walk in light but he couldn't see it.

He was blind, had been since his beginning...

not because he had sinned, not because his parents had sinned...

his blindness was just one of those accidents of being human.

Sometimes people get bad breaks.

For him, just as some people have blue eyes or brown eyes or green eyes,

his eyes were non-seeing eyes. That's who he was.

Throughout his life he had had no medical care,

no seeing eye dog, not even a walking stick to guide him.

A beggar by trade, he had no money,

no power, not even a name as far as anyone knew.

Still everyone in the community knew who he was –

the Blind Boy they called him.

They knew who he was – or at least they thought they did.

He seemed to them to have nothing to offer, he was just there.

Until Jesus came along and revealed that in God's eyes,
this Blind Boy had a purpose.

This unseeing – and largely unseen - man had been chosen by God
“so that God's works might be revealed **in him.**”

Jesus, the light of the world, spat on the ground
and from the dust of the earth made mud
and spread it on his eyes.

And after the mud and the washing in the waters of Siloam,
the blind man could see.

The neighbors and those who were accustomed to seeing him around
who had seen him as a fixture all his life
saw him now with **new eyes**, as if for the first time.

“Isn't he the beggar we saw on the corner every day?” they wondered.

Now that he was apparently no longer who they had thought him to be,
you know, the Blind Boy...

they weren't sure WHO he was, if it was even really him.

They had never seen HIM...they had only seen his blindness.

They realized they didn't know his name or what his life had been like,

what his story had been, what he liked and didn't like,

how independent he was able to be...

not even what he really looked like. What was the color of his eyes?

Did he have a beard or had he shaved it off?

Who was he? Surely more than just a pair of sight-impaired eyes!

If these neighbors thought they had seen what there was to see about the Blind Boy

it's for certain they hadn't truly seen Jesus.

Oh sure, some of the Pharisees thought they had –

clearly the man they saw, this Jesus, was a sinner and not a man from God.

After all he had healed on the Sabbath.

A man from God would never have done such a thing.

It was against Jewish law.

On the other hand, this man who had been blind could now see.

How to explain it?

Try as he might, the Blind Boy could not convince his inquisitors

that the One who healed him was from God.

“Never since the world began has it been heard

that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.

If this man were NOT from God, he could do nothing.”

Holding fast to their own version of things, they answered him

“You were born entirely in sins and are YOU trying to teach US?”

And they drove Jesus out.

When something miraculous happens to someone who we thought

we had seen all their lives,

and when that miracle upsets all we thought we had known –

how quick would WE be to throw out the source of the miracle

if WE felt threatened, if WE’D never seen anything like it before?

Pretty quickly I’d say!

Jesus is trouble – because he changes everything he touches.

If Jesus is around to rub mud in your eye, better watch out!

You might be surprised by what happens to you.

It’s one thing for us to say confidently

He brings all people out of their dark blindness into light and love...

to acknowledge that this is the one who IS the light of the world,
the love of God incarnate in this ever-shifting landscape of life
who works only for good in the world. Easy to say.

It's another thing to suddenly realize
that Jesus is as unseen as the Blind Boy.

When we are touched by his healing hand we don't recognize him.

The WHO Jesus is almost always gets lost in the "how did he do that?"

And when it seems to go against our rules,
when it threatens our way of seeing and thinking,
then this man can't be from God. Simple as that.

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Jesus, the light of the world.

I too was born blind.

Oh I thought I could see...and physically I can

My blindness looked – still looks – more like that of the neighbors
and the Pharisees.

I saw what Jesus looked like when I went to church growing up.

His huge portrait was behind the altar, a white male robed and sandaled
and sitting on a cloud, looking my way to be sure I behaved.

I saw a whites-only world in my church, at my school,
and within the parameters of where I was allowed to walk safely in Manhattan.

On the odd occasions when I saw a beggar on the steps of a church

I saw people with no name, no history,

no identity beyond the trash bags they hauled and their soiled faces and clothing.

I could see that they must have done something terrible

to be in such a state of disrepair and destitution.

I was comfortably complacent in my tidy white world of certainty.

Then came the day I got the mud in my eye.

One day years ago when my children were small and I was a single mom,

I was alone in the car, driving south on I-95

between exits 37 and 36 when my car got a VERY flat tire.

There were no cell phones then and the nearest exit wasn't near at all.

I felt panic surging through my body.

I thought "where are the cops when you need them?"

I thought "Maybe someone will stop and help..."

And I was lucky – before very long, someone did stop,
but not the someone I expected.

I expected a tall, white heroic Prince Charming who would roll up his business sleeves
and help this poor damsel in distress.

The black man I saw pulling up behind me, getting out of his truck
and swaggering toward me had the appearance of someone
I had been carefully taught to fear.

He wore a black muscle shirt and enough gold to open a store.

His key ring alone must have weighed 5 pounds with the number of keys he had on it.

I was terrified. I didn't know if I was about to be mugged
or robbed – or helped.

The man shook his head as he reached my car. No saving that tire, he said.

And opening my trunk (as I'm thinking thank God I have no valuables in there)

he pulled out my spare and jack which he found less than helpful.

He went back to his truck and returned with heavy machinery in hand.

My heart was in my throat.

The machinery turned out to be his own jack and power lug remover,

and in an instant he took off the bad tire, put on the spare,
gave me a big smile and said “that should do it.”

I tried to thank him, to pay him or at least give him money for a cup of coffee or a beer,
but he would have none of it.

“I’m glad I could make your day a little better,” he said as he turned
to get back in his truck and drive away.

I had been blind. I had judged on appearances.

What I had seen was what I knew to be the truth – until it wasn’t.

I have a friend who lives in SF, the land of earthquakes.

As you know, the newer buildings there have been built to withstand
hurricane force winds and badly shaking ground.

Now when the storms come, the facades of the buildings may fall
but the strong structure underneath remains.

That moment was my “earthquake day” – and in its wake,
not much was left of the old building in which until then I had lived my life.

A newer stronger building would have to be built.

That man - whose name I’ll never know – might as well have been Jesus.

And not because he miraculously changed my tire.

The miracle was that he touched – and changed – ME.

He might as well have been Jesus rubbing mud on my eyes.

By his kind words and actions, he was an instrument of God

bringing light into a darkness I didn't know was mine.

The mud he rubbed in my eyes opened them and suddenly I could see more clearly...

I could see him – but I could also see me and how blind I had been.

I had been earthshaken.

I still wonder what HE saw when he pulled over to help me.

What assumptions did he make based on what he saw?

Since that day, when that huge chunk of the structure

on which my world had been built collapsed completely,

I am continually amazed at the blindness of white people

who refuse to see the human suffering experienced

by our black and brown neighbors

our neighbors who are made to be invisible

at the hands of white privilege and power...(our present govt)

people kept out of sight through mass incarceration,

bad policing, poor education, inadequate housing, and unaffordable health care.

People in power can remain willingly blind to the struggles of those

they conveniently keep out of their sight lines,
privileging personal gain over personal lives.

Jesus, God incarnate who walked with the invisible then
and who walks with them to this day, does not see as HB's see,
those of us who look only on outward appearances
and make judgments from positions of power and privilege.

Jesus, with God's eyes, looks on the hearts of all of us,
rubs mud on the eyes of those who do not see in all their blindness
and opens them, when he can, to the true light of life.

It is the job of the church and each one of us
to stand with Jesus and with all who are made invisible
by those who rule the land to shine light in the dark places.

It can be painful. Facing one's own blindness hurts.

Standing with Jesus will not make us popular.

Systems and structures we once thought to be sturdy and safe
might crumble in the face of holiness.

But the true light brings life out of the death of darkness.

Jesus' healing touch reveals the love of God.

Through his eyes, we see that God loves who and what God sees
in all its/our vulnerability and weakness and need.

From the call of David – who no one saw as anything
but an insignificant shepherd boy – but who God saw as an ancestor to Jesus –
from King David to this very day,

WE see that appearances don't count for much to God.

God sees deep into the heart of God's children
deep into the heart of all who you are and all who I am.

God loves you for who you are, loves all you are.

This is the one who calls you by name, who gives YOU reason and purpose in life.

No matter who you are, you exist in some special way
so that God's works might be revealed in YOU.

In God's eyes, you are deeply, fully, truly seen.

There are times in our lives when every one of us
is in danger of discovering that we as individuals are blind,
and the systems of which we are a part are blind.

We don't really know or understand what we see.

Who is this Jesus? Who do you say that I am?

We are not sure of who we see even when he is right before our eyes.

We would do well to join the blind man

and admit our ignorance when it comes to seeing the Holy.

For our certainty risks being blindness

and our “I don’t know” may be the beginning of seeing God at work in the world.

Jesus is the light by which we truly see.

Today and in the days ahead, I wish you mud in your eye –

may Jesus reveal himself in some unexpected way

by an unexpected miracle,

and may your foundations be shaken that you may see that you walk in the light.

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The Rev. Julie Kelsey
St Thomas’s Church
Lent 4A 2017

