

Good morning. It was a humbling experience writing this sermon. I know there are many of us that are stressed out. We are all in a vulnerable place...some more extremely than others. We all have loved ones we are very concerned about. Our fellow human beings are ill and suffering...may God be with them all.

As I interpreted our gospel passage this morning, I was amazed once again to find that Jesus always—if we allow it—delivers us. He always delivers us—if we allow it—from what we think we know into the unknown, mysterious, works of God. He always delivers us—if we allow it—from the anxious, small place we make for ourselves into the immeasurable space He calls the kingdom of God. The question for today is: Do we allow it? Are we like the blind man in our scripture? Or are we like the Pharisees?

The main scripture for today is John 9: 1-41. I encourage you to have it handy as you read the piece below. As I alluded to above, pay close attention to the differences between the Pharisees and the blind man.

Jesus says to the Pharisees, *“If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see’, your sin remains”*.

Last week we heard the gospel of Jesus and the woman at the well. We heard Jesus tell her that the water that he gives eternally quenches our thirst, that it becomes in us *a spring of water gushing up to eternal life*. We saw that all we must do to quench *our thirst for God— our thirst for release, for freedom—* is return to the God that is Spirit within us...

This morning, Jesus, the one whose name means “deliverance”, once again speaks to us about freedom from that which binds us. In the story of “the man blind from birth”, our lesson comes to us through the metaphors of the blind man and the

Pharisees. But again, Jesus' theme remains the same: *freedom from that which binds us...* how many of us have not felt BOUND, trapped, both in our homes and in our heads, lately? This morning, strangely, it is the blind man who can see, it is the blind man who is "God sighted", it is the blind man who is NOT BLINDED by, bound by, what he sees so it is the blind man that does not "have sin". Therefore, it is the blind man that is free. And it is the Pharisees that are blinded by, bound by, what they see so their sin remains...they are "God-blind". The rebelliousness of Jesus should not be missed. He lovingly challenges us at every turn. With the above statement, *"If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see', your sin remains"*, Jesus was challenging and turning on its head the traditional-conventional religious wisdom represented by the Pharisees. Many in Jesus' time thought that the way to God—the way to freedom from sin—came by way of the tradition, through being "raised right", through conditioning and the accumulation of knowledge in the right school with the right teacher. That was the conventional wisdom in Jesus' day. And it is still the conventional wisdom for many in our day. Jesus asks us to look again...we will do so by looking at the metaphors of the blind and the Pharisees...

First, a man "blind from birth". There are a few important things to note about this "man blind from birth". First, Jesus says he has not sinned....and, interestingly, we are told that this man's blindness creates an opportunity for God's works to be revealed *in* him. Interior revelation, freedom from sin, and "blindness" are related.

What might this blindness symbolize? One born blind in Jesus' day could not read a word of the law and the prophets—there were no schools for the blind. Such a

person would be thought by many to be a sinner—that their sinful ways caused their blindness. They would probably be an outsider—most likely a beggar...an outcast. A blind man unable to read the law and the prophets symbolizes one who is not full of and *bound by* all the religious knowledge and ideas of the Pharisees....so he is open to this strange prophet-Christ.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, as I said above, were those that thought that the way to God, the way out of sin, was through the ideas and rituals of their tradition. Studying the scripture in the right schools with the right teachers. But Jesus, as we see so often, just thought that all that accumulation of knowledge and tradition made the Pharisees “full of it”. Why? Well, in Jesus’ way of looking at things our blindness is not defined by what we *can’t see*...but by *what we do see*. The blind man is not bound by the tradition. The blind man is not blinded by the false pride and religious certainty of the Pharisees and so he is open...he just sits and “begs”. I heard somewhere, “*The opposite of faith is not doubt but certainty*”. The Pharisees are certain, they have their rules and ideas and boy oh boy, you better conform to them—live within their box. They are blinded by and trapped within the rules, ideas, and boundaries they do see. What they see imposes limits on the limitless. With the boundaries of their tradition they attempt to define the indefinable. For them, Jesus can’t be the Christ because he doesn’t fit into their box—the boundaries, the walls, they have constructed and are blinded by, trapped behind. Therefore, Jesus says their “sin remains”. They are bound by what they see. They can’t see the Truth of the Christ because He is limitless, he doesn’t conform to their ideas. He “breaks” their rules. He heals on the Sabbath. Again, *we are blinded by what we see*. Our religious ideas about God

too often define God, in other words, they limit God...the limitless and the indefinable.

It is in this blind man who is a “beggar” that God’s works are revealed...why? Perhaps it is when we are blind that we see the Christ. Perhaps it is when we close our eyes and “sit and beg” that we see the Christ, the light of the world—the one that delivers us from that which binds us—whatever it is in our own lives. During Lent (and all year) we are asked to turn in this simple way toward God. This is not turning our back on the world and hiding—trust me, the world will still be there (actually you never leave it, you just go deeper into it) when you open your eyes. But—and here is the key—although the world is “still” there when you open your eyes—you just might *see it* in a new way, with new eyes. Sitting and “begging” like the blind man means we acknowledge our blindness...our uncertainty, our ABSOLUTE need for God...it is precisely then that we allow the Christ to free us, to open our eyes to that which is beyond...

To conclude, to say the least, we are in a challenging, strange time that can find us anxiously grasping for certainty, for answers. Maybe even thinking this doesn’t conform to my idea of God. Certainly, we are being asked to do church very differently. In our time and place grasping for certainty and answers often means turning toward the media. And some of that is useful—important—as our situation keeps changing. However, our spirits need rest. Jesus said, “Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.” To come to Jesus in this way requires that we come to Jesus like the blind man...requires that we just sit and be. To come to Jesus in this way requires that we come to Jesus like the blind man in all our darkness and uncertainty. The

Christ is there...God's works will be revealed. The Christ will open our eyes, free us, give us rest.

May the peace that surpasses all understanding be with you till we meet again.

Chris