

Grace Episcopal Church  
Fourth Sunday in Lent  
Rev Brian C Justice

1 Samuel 16.1-13  
Ephesians 58-14  
Psalm 23  
John 9.1-41

Enlightenment

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O God,  
May we  
be enlightened  
in love.  
Amen.

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The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke each contain an account of The Transfiguration when the Light of God shone fully through Jesus upon Mt Tabor. Peter, James, and John were with Jesus on Mt Tabor and saw the Light. And once they saw the Light there, they could not *un - see* it anywhere. They saw the Light of God in everything and in everyone.

They were enlightened.

In today's text from the Gospel of John a series of questions about sight and light are raised in the story of the Man Who Was Born Blind.

What is the Light of God?

Who can see the Light?

How does one see the Light?

Does it happen only through a miracle or a mystical vision? Is it only there in one of those mountaintop experiences?

How does one become enlightened?

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On one level, the literal level, the story of the Man Who Was Born Blind involves a dialectic between blindness and sight. Jesus enacts “a miracle” or, as John calls such events, “a sign.” The man was “blind from birth” and, after an encounter with Jesus, the man “received his sight.” John reports that Jesus

spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” ... Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

Both the condition of the man and the sign performed by Jesus provoked questions among the disciples and the crowd and the Pharisees.

The disciples ask if “this man or his parents” sinned “that he was born blind.” This question reflects a view in the ancient world common among Jews and Christians and pagans alike: that sicknesses and calamities were punishments for sin dealt out by God or the gods. But Jesus shatters that view in a terse reply to the question, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned.” That is not why he is blind; that is not why sicknesses and calamities happen.

The crowd, encountering the man who once was blind but then could see, asks if this really is the Blind Man, the beggar, the one whom they had rejected for his blindness? If it is the same man, then what happened? The Blind Man matter-of-factly tells the story of his encounter with “the man called Jesus.” The crowd wants to know where Jesus is. The man says, I don’t know.

The Pharisees ask a question about the rules, which is their main concern according to the tendentious New Testament portrayal of this class of rabbis from the local synagogues. How

did the man receive his sight, they wish to know. The man tells them. But because this sign was performed on the Sabbath, these religious leaders condemn Jesus and his actions. Sight or no sight in the Blind Man, Jesus broke the rules.

Questions from all these people about sin, about status, about rules. You learn a lot about people by the questions they ask.

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On another level, the theological level, this story involves more than blindness and sight. More than sin and status and rules. Because this story really isn't about any of those things.

This story is about encounter. It's about relationship. It's about what happens when one person cares for someone else with compassion. It is about the Light of God that shines through Love ... the Light that shines through a seemingly simple but life-changing, life-giving act of Love.

The Man Who Was Born Blind was utterly forsaken by his family and his village. Because of his infirmity, his disability, his difference, he was judged by the people to be unclean, a sinner, an outcast, an untouchable. He was abandoned ... and forced to beg for something to eat, something to drink. Because he was blind!

Had anyone ever touched this man?

Held his hand?

Hugged him?

Had anyone ever affirmed his inherent worth and dignity as God's very own beloved child?

Had anyone ever said to him, You are beautiful exactly as you are?

Had anyone ever said to him, I love you?

Jesus, John tells us, was walking along the road and *saw* the man. He *noticed* the man. He *recognized* his condition. He *stopped*. He *made* a healing balm from saliva and dust and spread it on the man's eyes. And the man washed in the pool of Siloam and "received his sight."

This is enlightenment. This is it. This is the whole thing. This is the Light of God that enlightens.

And what is the Light? It's Love. The Light is Love.

And this is what the Blind Man saw ... what he felt, what he knew, what he was reborn in, what he was enlightened in ... when he was with Jesus. And how did he see the Light? He saw the Light because he was touched by Love. He saw it because he was an untouchable ... and Jesus touched him anyway.

And the Light shone in Jesus, in the Blind Man, and for anyone who had eyes to see.

This is what Peter, James, and John saw on Mt Tabor at the Transfiguration (where *they* were transfigured as much as Jesus!).

Seeing the Light of Love in Jesus on the mountain, they suddenly realized the Light of Love shines everywhere.

Everything is holy, everything is sacred.

Jesus reveals this with the Blind Man.

And the Blind Man saw it!

The saliva ... that is the holy water of life that gives us life.

The dust ... that is the holy stuff of which you and I and the whole world are wonderfully made.

Spit and dust ... it's holy, it's sacred.

It comes from God, it's the gift of life, and you and I are it.

But what are we going to do with it?

Ask questions about who is a sinner and who is not?

Ask questions about who is welcome in our village and who is not?

Ask questions about who is clean and who is not?

Or, are we going to follow the Way of Jesus?

The Way of Light and Love and Life?

In the Letter to the Ephesians, St Paul calls us to the Way. He exhorts us to awake from spiritual sleep, to rise from spiritual death, and to live as children of the Light.

St Paul calls us to enlightenment.

Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."

Can you and I see the Light of the world? Or are you and I blind?

The sacred Light of Love shines through Jesus - through everything he says, everything he does, everything he is.

The Love Light shone through him on Mt Tabor.

It shone through him in the meeting with Nicodemus at night.

It shone through him in the encounter with the Samaritan Woman at the Well.

And it shone through him when he touched the untouchable, the man whom no one else would touch, the Man Who Was Born Blind.

He touched him because he loved him. And suddenly, the man could see.

Thanks be to God who is Light and who is Love.

Amen.