

## **Ready for Lent: Ready for Sight**

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael - March 22, 2020

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

**Readings Today:** 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

### **Sermon:**

Oh Lord, help us to be ready for you, ready to remember your mercy, ready to remember your love. Guide us by your Holy Spirit and grant us wisdom and understanding. That as the scriptures are read, and your Word proclaimed, may we be ready to listen, during this season of Lent. And let God's people say: Amen.

Our readings today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible\*. Our first reading is from First Samuel, chapter 16, verses 1 through 13.

*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. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah. (NRSV\*)*

Our second reading is from Ephesians, chapter 5, verses 8 through 14.

*Therefore, For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,*

*“Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” (NRSV\*)*

41. Our final reading for today is from the Gospel according to John, chapter 9, verses 1 through

*So he As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he 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” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”*

*They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”*

*The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”*

*So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is*

*a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 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.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.*

*Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains. (NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This has been an unusual week. Unprecedented, one might say. It looks like it will not be over quickly. So, I open with remembering that Lent is about recognizing sacrifice for the good of others and for the good of us all. We might not have imagined giving up all the things we are having to give up for Lent, but maybe this will help us to see what is most important in our lives. On the other side of this, maybe we will all emerge with a renewed sense of community and togetherness. Maybe we will see where we have been spending time that we didn't need to be and see places we wished we spent more. Maybe we will recognize needs that we never understood before. Lord, I hope you help us to be ready for sight in this time of trial.

We are given some different examples of what it means to be ready for sight in today's scriptures. The first is Samuel. Samuel is looking for a new king, as Saul has been a great disappointment and has been rejected. So God sends Samuel to the house of Jesse. Samuel is supposed to find the new king among Jesse's sons. Samuel begins looking for the next king. He looks at them and is looking at their physical appearance to figure out which one the Lord has chosen. And God stops him to say not so fast. God points out that he isn't looking the way mortals see but is choosing by what he sees in their hearts. So Samuel looks over all of Jesse's sons and finding none that are chosen is a little frustrated. He asks if this really is all Jesse's sons. Surprise! One is missing. David, the youngest, was still out tending sheep. It would seem that Jesse didn't see any reason to bring David in with the rest. Maybe it was because he was the youngest. Maybe Jesse just didn't see greatness in David. But when David appears before Samuel, Samuel anoints him, and the spirit of the

Lord comes over him. God saw something nobody else saw. God was seeing differently than others were seeing.

Paul gives us an example of being ready for sigh in that we are ready to live as children of light. That we are willing to see what is pleasing to the Lord. That we shouldn't take part in unfruitful works of darkness but expose them so that all can see them and know them. When we bring darkness into the light it fades away. This means being willing to stand up for truth and for honesty and for decency. We must be a people willing to stand up for what is right, willing to see what is good and what is not. What is helpful and what is not. And in this time of difficulty, what actions help us all together and what actions hurt us all together.

Then we come to Jesus and the man who was blind from birth. Now, there is a lot going on here. But what really got my attention is the way that Jesus opened the eyes of others by opening the eyes of the man born blind. The disciples want to know what this guy did to be born blind. They assume it had to be him or his parents. But it had to be someone's fault. They need someone to blame. Jesus shows us the same kind of sight we saw from our reading in Samuel, and he looks beyond preconceptions. He informs them that this man is blind so that God can be revealed in him. Now, what happens next shows that the man who was blind is not the one lacking *real sight* in this story. Because what should have been celebrated is suddenly scrutinized. Some people claim the guy who can see isn't the same person who was blind before. They want to know how it happened, they want to know why it happened, they want to know who did this! They don't think it could be from God because it happened on the sabbath. Everyone is arguing instead of seeing this for the good that it is. They panic. They focus on all the wrong things. They can't see what is right before them. A man who was blind can now see. They aren't listening to the man and get upset that he is thankful for the healing! Imagine that. Being so blind with mistrust and so blind with legalism that they can't praise God for doing something wonderful! The man who was blind upsets the people at the temple when he rightly recognizes that God must have sent Jesus if he could do something so wonderful for him. They claim that since he was born entirely in sin that he has nothing they should hear. They refuse to see what was right before them. They lacked sight.

Now, here is something about really caring for someone that I think everyone should take note of. Everything that happened so far is amazing enough. It is shocking enough. We've already seen Jesus do something wonderful and great, but there's something else that he does. He follows up. He shows this man care in the wake of everything else that has already happened. When Jesus hears that they have driven him out, he goes to find him. He follows up. Because Jesus knows that it isn't enough to just heal his eyes and run, Jesus knows that this man needs to know that he isn't simply going from being an outcast because he was blind to being an outcast because he can see.

What all three of today's readings share is that God looks beyond the physical that we so often trap ourselves with. God sees beyond our short-sighted worries and fears. God sees beyond our need to explain everything away. We all get that way sometimes. I know I can. If we can't understand something, often we are ready to dismiss it. Samuel expected a tall warrior for the next king. If Samuel

had been stubborn like the Pharisees, he would have simply told God that he was wrong for picking David. Can you imagine that? Telling God that he doesn't know what he is doing? But we often do it. The Pharisees do it in the gospel account today. They think there is no way that God would use a man born into sin. They don't think healing would be done on the sabbath. They don't like what doesn't fit in their little world view. So they reject the good because it doesn't fit with who they are trying to make God into. They are so caught up in not seeing the good that they don't see God. How often do we do that though? How often do we want to dismiss someone for having a different view of God because of the life they lived? How often do we want to discount someone else's experience with God because it doesn't fit what we want God to be? How often do we make ourselves blind instead of being willing to see where God is at work?

So what can we do? Give up? No! We give up trying to put God in a box. People wanted to put God in a box by dictating that the Messiah was to be a warrior, God instead delivered a suffering Savior. People wanted to put God in a box saying people couldn't be healed on the sabbath, so Jesus heals on the sabbath to show that God is always at work. People are always going to want to put God in another box and get him to play by their rules. Over and over again, God gives sight to those who were blind and those who should be able to see make themselves blind. We have to be willing to look for God and see God wherever God is. We have to be ready for sight, even if that sight shows us things that we don't understand. We have to be ready to open our hearts to God's unyielding grace so that we can understand what God is doing right now! We need to be ready so that we can be a part of the healing and the hope instead of being a stumbling block. We need to give up the box we are trying to keep God in and welcome God as God comes. In the face of a neighbor, in the face of an enemy, in the face of the poor, in the face of the sick, in the face of the prisoner, in the face of the stranger. We must be ready to see where we are needed and to go in love. We must be ready to do all that we can for the Savior that gave all that he could to show us we were loved. To give us sight. To give us hope. To give us love. To give us a tomorrow that we can look forward to. Let us always remember that Christ is with us, always ready to let him give us sight. And let us always be willing to act on what we see. Amen.

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