

*1 Sam. 16:1-13, John 9:1-41*

*Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Evie Macway*

*March 19, 2023*

## Assumptions

Our suggested readings for this morning gives us two powerful stories. The first one that Marta just read for us from First Samuel, is about the anointing of young, who-would-have-thought, David, as king of Israel. And then we have this story from John that is our gospel reading for today. It is another story of Jesus and the people he meets in his travels. We could be here for days pondering what these stories might have to say to us in our lives today. We won't though, I promise. Even though I thought about it. We will focus this morning on this story from John, but feel free to sit with this story of David and Samuel if you like too.

Turning now to our gospel reading for today, Martin Luther, known often as the father of the Protestant Reformation, once wrote, "John's Gospel is the one, fine, true and chief gospel, and is far, far to be preferred over the other three and placed high above them."<sup>1</sup> I don't think I would go quite to that extreme, but if you pushed me to choose I would probably agree with Luther. John is my favorite.

So, I am particularly enjoying our suggested Gospel readings this Lenten season. This year, as I have mentioned last Sunday, our readings for worship this Lent are taking us on a journey through several of the most well known of the stories of Jesus found in John. A couple of Sundays ago we heard about Jesus and Nicodemus. Last week we heard the story of Jesus and the woman at the well. This week it is the story of Jesus and the man born blind.

In the early church these stories were often read in their entirety during the season of Lent as part of catechism classes, the series of classes adults took to learn about the faith in preparation for baptism into the Christian church, that would take place on Easter Sunday. These stories were considered key in learning who Jesus Christ was and what it meant to be a part of his body, the church in the world.

In honor of this tradition, this week I am going to once again do our sermon/scripture time a bit differently than our usual. First I will read the story, and I invite

---

<sup>1</sup> Frances Taylor Gench, *Encounters with Jesus*, pg. xi.

you to just listen for where the story takes *you* this day. Where the Spirit takes *us* in the hearing this morning. My father was a fantastic story teller and I grew up listening to his stories. So good stories always pull my imagination. This story itself may be your sermon for this morning. And that would be great.

Following the reading I will share with you a bit of where my reflections on this story took me this week.

Reading now from the ninth chapter of the gospel of John:

**John 9:1-41 Common English Bible (Common English Bible)**

I read a commentator this week who wrote, “One of our most clear and cherished images for who Jesus is and what he represents in our lives is that of the image of light. It comes to us from the mouth of Jesus in John’s gospel: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) The image conveys Jesus’ role as revealer - the one through whom God’s light shines, and the one who illumines the meaning and purpose of human life. Our response to the light of God manifest in Christ has implications for how we walk, that is, how we live our lives. Light can illuminate our path and our walking. However, if we obstinately stare at it and refuse to recognize its power, we can be blinded.”<sup>2</sup>

I had never thought of it that way. ...if we obstinately stare at it and refuse to recognize its power, we can be blinded. What does that look like in my life?

This week, as I sat with this story it became for me a story about my assumptions and the difficulty they can cause me. When do I, maybe we, look straight at the power of God in the world and refuse to see it because it does not fit the way we think it should be?

The disciples see the man born blind as an opportunity for a theological discussion on the thorny question of human suffering. “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents?” There must be a reason for suffering. Some one must be to blame. “Teacher, help us make sense of painful life experiences.”

Jesus, though is not interested in this line of thinking. First, he declares that the man's blindness is not the result of sin, neither his parents' nor his own. Powerful

---

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pg. 64.

message right there. Second, he moves the question away from past causes and toward future possibilities. The man's blindness becomes the opportunity for Jesus to show forth the glory of God.<sup>3</sup>

And we have the first of many refocusing in this story. “Stop asking abstract moral questions my friends and get about the business of healing!”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus heals the man. Interestingly, we do not hear a word from the man up to this point - no statement of faith, no request for mercy. The healing takes place solely at Jesus' initiative and is unconditional - and act of pure grace. Our final hymn this morning will be Amazing Grace because we just need to. God's amazing grace is without a doubt one of the themes of this story.

What follows though here, is the story of a community wrestling and coming to terms with their own assumptions in light of that amazing grace.

There are the neighbors. They ask, “Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?” This just does not fit. They have their understanding of this man and of the social structure of their community, of the way things are suppose to be. And a man who has been blind all of his life suddenly seeing does not fit. Their assumptions about the man blind them to the possibilities of grace and healing.

It is like the story of Samuel and David. Samuel, still grieving the loss of King Saul is sent by God to Jesse to chose from among his sons the man who will be the next king.

Samuel has an idea of what a king should look like. He thinks he knows who God will chose. Seven of Jesse's sons come before him. But God says, “No, do not look on appearance or on the height and stature; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” And finally God says yes to the youngster, the little guy who Jesse did not even think to mention. And David is anointed king. When do our assumptions blind us?

The Pharisees in our story of the blind man have the same assumptions the neighbors have. But on top of that they are deeply rooted in ‘the way things are’ in terms of their religion. That is a dangerous combination, isn't it? Not only thinking you know what is right, but also assuming God is on your side. The Pharisees are

---

<sup>3</sup> David R. Lyle, *The Christian Century, Sunday's Coming: Who Did This?*, March 20, 2017

<sup>4</sup> Frances Taylor Gench, *Encounters with Jesus*, pg. 65.

so furious and so sure of themselves that they expel the man from the synagogue. And they have the power to do it. Or at least they think they do. “You don’t believe like we believe. You don’t follow our rules. You don’t belong here.”

Then Jesus returns to the story. And meets the man again. The man has been rejected by his neighbors, by his faith community, and even by his parents. “He is old enough. Ask him.” And Jesus comes to him and invites him in. “You see with your eyes. Now you see with your heart.”

And the Pharisees? Despite the light right in front of them, they still can not see. “Surely we aren’t blind, are we?”

There is a lot to take in with this story, isn’t there? I see myself in the Pharisees and the neighbors. Holding tight to what I think I know, what I think I see.

I hope that I can be more like Samuel and the formerly blind man, who, by the grace of God do finally see, at least sometimes.

This Lenten Season and always, may we walk in the light of Christ and may our steps reflect Christ’s love and grace.