

Sermon - 03-19-23
Ps 23; 1 Sam 16:1-13; Eph 5:8-14; Jn 9:1-41
Darkness to Light – Blindness to Sight
4th Sun in Lent

Abraham Heschel said, “God is not a hypothesis derived from logical assumptions, but an immediate insight, self-evident as light. He (God) is not something to be sought in the darkness with the light of reason. He (God) is the light.” (brainyquote.com)

Rabbi Heschel was a beloved and learned Hebrew thinker who commented on and wrote about the Old Testament. Yet, his words here perfectly describe Jesus – especially the way Jesus taught the people with tangible, concrete things. Jesus is the light of the world. This very long story (John 9:1-41) sets the man blind from birth against the Pharisees who claim to see the ways of God more clearly than anybody. The man experiences personally Jesus’ miraculous, life-altering touch that brings in light he never saw before. Jesus tells the Pharisees that their stubborn denial of this miracle amounts to the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit – embracing darkness not light.

The blind man comes into the light of Jesus’ presence– the seeing church leaders remain in darkness. Here is the main theme of John’s Gospel – spiritual light overtaking spiritual darkness. This is a concrete sign of Jesus’ divine nature: the man’s eyes, optic nerves, retinas and lenses are made whole by mud composed of Jesus’ saliva and a handful of earth. We feel the power and poetry of it. True light penetrates the darkness. This healing reveals the foundation of reality – of the entire universe. God made it and God does with it as He pleases. How often we forget this! Human standards are not God’s standards.

As the story opens, the disciples seem to look upon this blind man – begging in the street – as “a case study.” The sorry human tendency to blame the afflicted for their affliction is on full view when the disciples ask whether “this man or his parents sinned and caused him to be born blind.” (v 1) An academic question if there ever was one – a question the Pharisees would ask.

Jesus said, “You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world’s Light.” (Jn 9:3-5 MSG)

Look for what God can do! That search – when pursued in faith – is the source of light to a world plunged into darkness by sin and rebellion. The Apostle Paul teaches the Ephesians (and us), “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” (Eph 5:11)

It seems to me the search for truth – particularly the Truth of Christ raises a beacon in our community that sheds light on dark things with no finger-pointing and no accusation. Remember to ask the right questions: What can God do in this situation? How can I be pleasing to my Lord here and now? What’s the next right thing to do?

Jesus had a run-in with the temple leadership. (John chapter 8) They tried to stone Him, but He made Himself hard to see – a little divine joke – and safely left the temple. Following that conversation, Jesus reassured those who believed in Him. “...Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’” (Jn 8:31-32)

We can find light and darkness on the same street in any town. One household seeks the truth continually – another chooses to dwell in the shadows. In any committee or work group, club or association there will be children of light and children of darkness. Jesus followers are not naive or ignorant of the motives of our fellow human beings. We are encouraged by the Word of God, as Jesus told the believers (Jn 8:31) to know the truth and live in the freedom only Christ can give. This is our take-away for today.

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All Jesus' signs and miracles were done in the light of His glory. He always gave praise and thanks to His heavenly Father for the healings and the wonders He was able to perform, like giving sight to a man born blind. The scoffing and contempt of the hard-hearted people of Jerusalem were exposed by the good things Jesus did. The man who was healed simply said, "...though I was blind, now I see." (v 25) The church leaders kicked the man out of the Temple for telling the truth.

Jesus told the man He healed, *"For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.' Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, 'We are not blind too, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, "We see," your sin remains."* (Jn 9:39-41)

The Pharisees' arrogant self-assurance blinded many of them to the truth. Jesus fulfilled every prophecy made about His mission and ministry in the world. The man born blind saw it. The light of Christ shines in and through those who live out the Gospel Good News in the midst of those who have not yet believed.

How we pray and work for the world to see the Light of Christ!

We are not called to judge, but to "live as children of light." (Eph 5:8) Our Shepherd Jesus leads us on right paths through the darkest valley. He cares for those who believe in Him. Jesus cares also for those who are far from Him. Keep carrying His light into every situation! Amen.