

A-Lent 4, 2008  
St. Luke's, Renton, WA  
Kevin Pearson, Preacher

John 9.1-41

*I once was lost, but now am found  
Was blind, but now I see*

These lines of a song we know so well are a tale of grace—of love—breaking into our worlds—love that we understand, feel, and know it to be true. We were adrift and now are held; we were once in the dark and have come into the brightness of the day.

I must say, it was awfully nice to see Spring episodically over the last weeks. The brightness piercing winter's gloom was a real lift. The sunny weather drew my attention to the landscape and forests that are beginning to show forth the fruit of several months of inner and underground work. In my own yard, the Trillium and tulips have shoved their faces up through the ground to enjoy the sunshine, even though it appears unseasonable and short-lived.

That brief taste of Spring is akin to this Sunday in the middle of Lent. The fourth Sunday in Lent is known as Rose Sunday or Refreshment Sunday. It is a day on which Christians through the ages lessened the ardor of their self-denying discipline in order to enjoy the light and life of grace that is with us at all times.

It is also a time of calm before the storm of Holy Week. And we'll need light for that journey. We'll need sight to enter with our eyes wide open.

Today's texts are about seeing clearly despite the odds, seeing with the heart, living in the light, moving from blindness to sight.

John uses the metaphors of darkness and light in his gospel with abandon. Jesus is the light in the darkness; he is the light the darkness could not comprehend. And today's gospel is a story of Jesus extending light—bringing sight, to a man born blind.

Of course, there's more to it than meets the eye, for what it means to see is more than vision. Notice in the story how man born blind first receives his sight and then through the rest of the story he is examined over and over by the Pharisees who are trying to figure out who this Jesus is and where he came from. All the while the blind man, who has never seen Jesus, becomes more and more confident. He begins to see through the Pharisee's charade. He hears and sees the darkness of their confusion and their inability to see outside of the box of their own belief system. He even chides them, "Do you also want to become his disciples?" He goes so far, even to point out their theological inconsistencies. The one who was blind now watches while those who appeared to be sighted become blinded by their outlook and the way they understand the ways of God. This is the irony of the story: the blind see and the sighted are blind.

The blind man's journey into sight, into insight, and living in the light is a discipleship journey. It is the path of a person becoming a follower of Jesus. It is the way of one who is intent on enlightenment. And the truth is, we pass from blindness to sight over and over and over again as we journey more and more deeply into Christ.



In the early centuries of the church, the story of the man born blind was one of the primary stories taught to those who were preparing for baptism. It was one of the texts used to teach catechumens the mystery of this new life in Christ. And interestingly, enlightenment was a term commonly used for baptism. Entering into the waters was evidence that the candidate was receiving new eyes to see.

Brother Richard Rohr says no one teaches us the mysteries anymore. Whereas past cultures have initiated people into the life of faith by revealing to them the sacred mysteries. We live in a more blinded culture and we go about living in our illusions. And one of the greatest illusions is that we continue to ascend in strength and power and influence.

The sacred Pascal [or Easter] mystery teaches us something else. The way forward from here on our Lenten journey has us walk the way of the cross with Jesus. We walk through the valley of the shadow of death. It's this point that most of us want to skip to Easter Sunday. "Just give us happiness." But the true happiness, we know, the true joy is on the other side, and it will require us to be altered, transformed, and given new eyes to see.

W.H. Auden writes,

We would rather be ruined than changed.  
We would rather die in our dread  
Than climb the cross of the moment  
And see our illusions die.

But climb the cross we must do, one way or another. And there will be that amazing grace that allows us to relinquish our illusory selves into the arms of God's mercy and that amazing grace that allows us to see again and with new eyes of love.

A rabbinic story:

A teacher asks his students about the dawning of true light. "When can you tell when day is breaking?" One student suggests that it is when you look down the road and you see an animal and there is enough light to tell whether it is a fox or a dog. "No," insists the rabbi, "that's not the right answer." Another student ventures to answer the question. "It's when you look at an orchard and you can tell the difference between an apple and a pear tree." The rabbi shakes his head, and the students, in frustration, all shout, "Then, tell us! When can you tell when the day has dawned?" the rabbi replies, "Day breaks when you look at a man or a woman and know that he or she is your brother or your sister. Until you can do that, no matter what time of day it is, it is always night."

It seems to be that to love, reconcile, forgive is what it means to see.