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Reflection for March 22nd, 2020

Seeing is Believing?

John 9: 1-41

This morning, due to COVID-19, we are meeting virtually for the first time. It is my hope and prayer that those of you who attend regularly, and those of you may be finding us online for the first time, find comfort and sustenance in this time of uncertainty in our nation and in our world. I encourage each of you to continue to reach out to one another in love through phone calls, e-mails, messaging, and other ways that help keep us connected during this time of social distancing. While we continue to trust in God, we also continue to be mindful that we are Jesus' hands and feet in the world, in whatever way, shape, or form that may take.

If you have not already done so, please take the time to read John 9: 1-41. It is another long passage from the lectionary, but is well worth your time. I encourage you to read it as you would read a story. In this

well-known story, Jesus restores sight to a man who has been blind since birth. Similarly to last week's story of the Samaritan woman at the well, the blind man whose sight Jesus has restored comes to recognize Jesus' divinity in stages, first calling Him a prophet in verse 17, and then a man from God in verse 33, and finally, worshiping Jesus and calling Him Lord in verse 38.

Like the well-known hymn *Amazing Grace*, the man is blind but now he sees, and yet it takes him some time to adjust from blindness to sight, from darkness to light, faced with the blinding light of Jesus the Christ. Are there times when we are blinded to what God is doing in the world? Are we aware of how Jesus is acting in and through us for the salvation of the world? When we celebrate Communion together, do we go out proclaiming the death and Resurrection of our Lord, or do we just go about our normal business, or busy-ness?

The pandemic which we find ourselves suddenly in the midst of has, if nothing else, given us more time to be with our families. Our

usual hectic routines have been replaced by a new schedule of children doing school work from home and parents working remotely from home on projects that just a short while ago may have been on the back burner. Our only trips out now are to the grocery store. In a way, it is a gift, this slowing down of time, this pausing to remember the words of Psalm 46:10—“Be still, and know that I am God.”

In these unprecedented times in which we live, in which in-person worship services, including ours, are cancelled across the country, how are we shining Jesus’ Light into the darkness that is seemingly engulfing our world? Are we mailing or e-mailing letters and notes of comfort and encouragement? Are we picking up the phone and calling friends, neighbors, and loved ones in need of a reassuring word? Are we reaching out through social media to offer a sense of calm in the storm? Remember Jesus’ calming of the storm as the disciples panicked on the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee? (For reference, see Mark 4: 35-41). The disciples feared for their lives, and yet Jesus was with them, asleep

in the stern of the boat. When the disciples woke Jesus out of sheer terror for their lives, Jesus immediately calmed the storm by saying “Peace, be still” to the wind and the waves. And then there was calm.

This morning’s Psalm 23 reminds us: “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me.” Even though our anxiety may be causing us to be blinded by fear, Jesus’ Light is showing us the way. If Jesus could bring a man blind since birth to faith in Him, how much more can Jesus do for us if we only allow Him to work in and through us, to calm our sin-sick souls, as the words of *Amazing Grace* remind us. The innate goodness of humanity often shines through during times of crisis such as this. Whether it is a choir in California giving their concert online by all coming together to sing from their homes over video conferencing, people honking Happy Birthday to a four year old in Michigan whose birthday party was canceled, others stringing Christmas lights up in March, or people in apartment buildings in New York singing from their

balconies in a nightly ritual, the kindness and innate goodness of humanity is shining through. Jesus is the Light of the World, and yet darkness threatens all around us. Jesus needs us to be lights in the world, hope amid the hopelessness, trusting in Him in spite of our fearfulness. Jesus needs all of us, you and me, to be His hands and feet in the world in times such as these.

The transformation that the blind man undergoes when Jesus makes mud, puts it on his face, and tells Him to go wash in the pool of Siloam (which means *Sent*) is not just one of blindness to sight. It reveals Jesus as the One whom God sent to be our Salvation, our Rock and our Redeemer. Jesus was sent to be the Light in this world of darkness not just to the man who was born blind, but to all humanity. Jesus confirms as much when he tells the disciples that neither the man nor his parents have sinned, but that he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him through Jesus the Christ.

The Pharisees look down upon the man whom Jesus has healed as they look down upon Jesus for healing on the Sabbath out of concern that their authority is being challenged and usurped by Jesus. In their sightedness, they are being blinded by jealousy, by concern for their own reputations. It is their authority that is being challenged by Jesus' healings and teachings, they feel. Instead of recognizing Jesus as One who is Heaven-sent, all they see is a threat to their power and to the status-quo.

How often do we play the role of the Pharisees? How often do we feel threatened by the success of others in this hyper-competitive culture in which we live? If nothing else, it seems the COVID-19 crisis is bringing Republicans and Democrats together to pass legislation in hours and days that would ordinarily take weeks or months. Athletes who normally compete against one another are looking for ways to help. Just the other day, the Cleveland Cavaliers' Kevin Love donated \$100,000 of his own money to help the workers at the basketball arena

his team calls home during the NBA's suspension of the regular season (as seen on NBC's TODAY SHOW). When we stop thinking in terms of Us versus Them, our country and our world can become a unifying force for good. What acts of kindness can you do this week? How can you help support those most vulnerable and most in need at this time? How can you bring the Light of Jesus to shine on the darkness that envelops us?

The Pharisees were concerned with following the letter of the law. Often, it seems that our politicians behave the same way, until a crisis causes those walls to crumble, and suddenly we read that the Senate Majority Leader is urging passage of a relief bill "despite its many shortcomings". Why must it take a crisis for us to all come together as one? Many, many Christian denominations have been formed through the years, usually because some disagreement over church polity or government causes a new rift, and a new branch begins to grow from the tree of many branches. If we go back in history far

enough, we recall that Abraham is the father not just of Christianity, but of Judaism and Islam as well. The world's three major monotheistic religions all share a common ancestry; a common heritage. Jewish believers still wait for the Messiah to come to redeem Israel, reunite the tribes of Israel, and rebuild the temple, while Christians believe Jesus is the Messiah, and Islam regards Jesus as a prophet and the Messiah sent to the Israelites, who will come again with the *Mahdi*, the eschatological redeemer, at the end of times to defeat the false Messiah. And yet, these three great monotheistic religions have diverged from one another, and Christianity in turn, has diverged into multiple churches and denominations, all confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, our Lord and Savior.

Jesus is indeed the Light of the World, the Light we need in our world threatened by the current COVID-19 pandemic, and the Light we are to share with all those who feel themselves hemmed in by the darkness. As the Letter to the Ephesians, attributed to Paul, says, "For

you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true)" (Eph. 5: 8-9). Now, more than ever, we need Christ's Truth, Christ's Light, and Christ's Love in the world. Walk in the ways of Christ, and be that Light, for Christ's Light shines in you as it shines in me. When we open the eyes of our heart so that we see Jesus once again, we can share Jesus with those most in need of His saving grace, His Truth, and His Love. As the well-known gospel song *This Little Light of Mine* reminds us: "Hide it under a bushel—No! I'm gonna let it shine! Let it shine! Let it shine!" Follow Christ's blinding light, and like a lighthouse warning sailors of the rocky shoals, live into Christ and be a beacon of hope in these turbulent times in which we live. Amen.