

'Enlighten Us'

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

March 26, 2017 -- 4th of Lent

1 Samuel 16:1-13 (NRSV) 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." {2} 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.'" {3} 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." {4} 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?" {5} 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. {6} When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the LORD." {7} 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." {8} Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." {9} Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." {10} Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." {11} 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." {12} 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." {13} 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.

Ephesians 5:8-14 (NRSV) For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light-- {9} for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. {10} Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. {11} Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. {12} For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; {13} but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, {14} for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

John 9 (NRSV) As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. {2} His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" {3} Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. {4} We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. {5} As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." {6} 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, {7} saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. {8} 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?" {9} Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." {10} But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" {11} 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." {12} They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." {13} They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. {14} Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. {15} 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." {16} 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. {17} 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." {18} 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 {19} and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" {20} His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; {21} 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." {22} 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. {23} Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." {24} 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." {25} He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." {26} They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" {27} 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?" {28} Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. {29} We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." {30} The man answered, "Here is

an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. {31} We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. {32} Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. {33} If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." {34} They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. {35} Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" {36} He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." {37} Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." {38} He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. {39} 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." {40} Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" {41} Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Do me a favor for a few seconds. Close your eyes. Just for a minute or two. Tom cut the lights. Go ahead close them. Take some deep breaths and be quiet and listen. Don't open them – for a minute or two – just feel the darkness. Keep them closed. Now for a moment imagine this is how you lived your life. In darkness. Unable to see that person closest to you. Unable to see what you hear. This is how millions of people spend their lives. It was the life of the man born blind.

Open them. Lights Tom. Thank God for sight and imagine this encounter with Jesus we read about on this fourth Sunday in Lent.

The story as it's told by John starts with and gets wrapped up in a theological debate between Jesus and his disciples and Jesus and the Pharisees about the source of the man's blindness. Even before Jesus spreads his muddy concoction on his eyes the disciples want to know? Is he blind because of sin – his or his parents or his ancestors?

After his visit to the pool of Siloam – the man can see and for him all the questions, who what when why how? Don't matter. All he knows is that he can see. All he knows is that he was blind – in darkness – and now his world is filled with vision and with light.

Suddenly, without even having a chance to figure out the difference between green and blue – or making the revelation about a visible face that goes with the voice of his mom – the man born blind is forced to defend something that

he doesn't understand – blind one minute – sighted the next. Grilled about the source of his sight, with the naysayers, of course, claiming he was never blind in the first place and just seeking attention – with the guys, the lame, the deaf, the diseased who sat begging with him questioning if he's who they thought he was so that he has to say, 'come on guys --- it's me – I don't understand it but I can see.'

Jesus, the light of the world, provides sight for this man – and we get to watch and we get to see how Jesus uses the occasion to take this discussion to another level, a level which is more about vision than sight. Pushed to the limit, with the t.v. lights shining in his newly opened eyes, the man born blind says, "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 he went and looked for him 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 looking into his eyes 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.

But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains. It's at this moment in this long story that this becomes for us a Lenten story. Jesus has come into the world to deal with sin and one of the major consequences of sin is blindness – spiritual blindness – blindness to the plight of others – blindness to sinfulness that keeps us from being open eyed and open minded. Blindness that is only eradicated when we are made able, when we are made willing to see what God wants us to see.

Old Nathan goes, grumbling, as God commands him and what his eyes tell him is that this is a fine parade of young male potential for a new phase in the royalty of Israel. But looks can be deceiving. None of them are the one. Nathan is forced to ask, "Are all your sons here?" And Jesse answers, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "fetch him, we're not resting until I lay eyes on him." 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." God gave the vision and Nathan saw the choice.

IN Lent we come face to face with the truth that our own sinfulness blinds us to the purpose and ways of God. Our sinfulness keeps us from being able to see -- to discern that which God wants for us -- that which is God's will for us. And

the more we adamantly claim that our vision is correct -- that the way we see things is the correct way -- the more blind we are. It is only in allowing ourselves to be redeemed in Christ that our vision can become clear. Only in realizing that it is Christ in us that sees can we understand what we are to be and to do.

Maybe the truth is that this is what keeps us from stepping into the light and claiming the vision Christ gives us. Maybe we have greater fear for the scrutiny and condemnation of those around us than we do for the God who made us. How often do we see and hear and discern things that are not right that we know are outside of God's will -- and to keep from being chastised or singled out as some kind of 'do-gooder' we do nothing? How often we forget that we are given the gift of sight -- we are sent by God and washed in order to declare of our Lord -- I was blind -- but now I see.

Sometimes we are simply going along, blithely in our blindness, when an encounter with Jesus opens our eyes, When a person or a situation or an opportunity comes from the shadows and into the light of day. A number of years ago Jesus came to us through a volunteer at ACS who brought to light the opportunity of making the lives of kids brighter and with a jar of jelly. That was thousands of jars of jelly ago. Jesus said through someone, "here's some light for you -- did you know a local church can have a real impact on homelessness from the family's perspective.' We've seen families come and go and loved for ten years. Jesus whispered to us through someone, 'did you know right here in our

modern affluent city that there are babies who go home from the hospital without anything to wear?" Hundreds of babies are wrapped in light and love. Jesus touched eyes and we saw children whose lack of nutrition on the weekends made their eyes dim on Mondays and backpacks are packed and children are fed. Three years or so ago Jesus walked in my office door in the person of a man named Eliot and said 'do you see these children in Haiti? Do you think you can muster enough vision to help?' Children see God's love in food and clothing and medicine and hope what is to come. God opens us – will we see?

Do you believe that even with all of the fuss surrounding him that the man born blind would choose to retreat into blindness? Even in the glaring light and the public scrutiny of his sinfulness would he choose to go back? Sometimes gaining sight is uncomfortable. This week my phone rang and I heard a story about farm workers down in Immokalee fl who harvest 90% of the winter tomato harvest who have been on a "Return to Human Rights Tour" bringing enlightenment to the world of consumers who don't realize what life is like for them. Who want to ask the question, were these workers born poor? They belong to the Fair Food Program which has changed their reality over the past few years. It seems that a penny a pound, paid by buyers of farm goods and of course passed on to you and I makes the difference between near slave treatment and the ability to see a better life? These are people who have been given a vision and an opportunity to rise up from poverty but who face the sinful greed of buyers

who would rather get their tomatoes from Mexico than pay the penny.

MacDonalds, Burger King, Taco Bell and others have seen the light and are joining the Fair Food Program, which now covers more than 34,000 workers harvesting tomatoes, peppers and strawberries in seven states.. Wendy's has not. Neither has Publix. Now when blind, we simply do not see, or comprehend the sin. But Jesus opens eyes. The PC USA has called for Wendy's to change their practice. Until they do we are called to boycott Wendy's. Here's the terrible dilemma. Is it easier to see – to truly see – to make ourselves aware and understand – or to ignore, to wear blinders, to live in chosen darkness.

The writer of Ephesians says this for us very well. “ For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light-- {9} for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. {10} Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. {11} Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. {12} For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; {13} but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, {14} for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Does the light of Christ shine in and through us? Do we see with the eyes of Christ or do we insist on our own distorted vision? Do we, when forgiven and made whole in Christ and come to know him as our Lord -- worship him as we should? With our whole being -- holding nothing back?

Christ stands before us once again, ready and willing to allow us to clearly see that which is God's will for us. Will we give up our less than perfect sight -- for the vision he offers? That which will heal, us, forgive us and make us whole is within our grasp -- it is right before our eyes -- do we take hold and live?