

March 26, 2017 at Advent Lutheran Church in Cedarburg, Wisconsin. Fourth Sunday in Lent. John 9:1-41. The man born blind receives his sight. (Please be seated for the treading of the Gospel...)

Blindness is one of the most **common** as well as **powerful** themes in both Old and New Testaments. Jesus uses the theme in the same way that **Helen Keller**, in her wisdom famously reflected;

“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.”

Blindness from birth in the Bible times was **not uncommon** due to a disease which sets in a few days after birth.

The Gospel lesson we read is **obviously** about both **physical and spiritual blindness**. The man in the story was **born blind**, perhaps with the illness I mentioned. But it is important know that in the **Gospel of John** the word **blind** is also used as a **verb** meaning **to obscure spiritual perception**.

In our common everyday language, we use the word **“see,”** from sight to acknowledge that we understand something, as in **“Oh, I see.”** Physical sight is only one aspect of **seeing** and **blindness**. That’s why Jesus says to the **Pharisees**:

“I came into the world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”

This statement contains the meaning of this entire passage. Whenever Jesus encounters people, most especially religious people, he tries to **open their eyes**, that is their **understanding**, that things are not always as they seem to be.

For instance, **last Sunday** in the story about the **Canaanite woman** at the well, religion taught that she was unworthy of his attention, an enemy and morally unacceptable because of her multiple marriages and lifestyle choices.

Jesus says that if we think **that**, then we are **blind** to the reality that she is a **victim** of cruel and immoral circumstances at the hands of **men** and guilty of nothing. And if we think that she is an **enemy**, we are **blind** to the fact that all human beings are created in God’s image and worthy of inclusion in God’s wonderfully diverse family.

Indeed, Jesus suggests that we are **blind** to the fact that there really is **no enemy except** the one **we create for ourselves**. It seems like we **pick** and **choose when** and **what** we want to **see** and **believe**. That is a kind of **blindness**.

And most especially as I have mentioned before and as the **Oxford English Dictionary** has affirmed, we are living in the **Post Truth Era**. That is a most **dangerous** thing, because if words mean **whatever** we decide and want them to mean instead of what they **do** mean then ultimately communication descends into **chaos** and **irrelevance** and conversation becomes impossible!

I am reminded of the oft heard **idiom** that was born from the encounter between the **Risen Jesus** and the **disciple Thomas**. When the other disciples tell **Thomas**, they have seen the Risen Jesus, **Thomas** says to them:

‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.

Thomas, like many of us will believe only that which is **tangible, provable, touchable, physical**. He is a symbol or **metaphor** for what Jesus in his entire message repeatedly tries to tell his listeners from the **Canaanite** woman at the well, to **Nicodemus** and the conversation about being born again, to the thief on the cross.

Mainly, that reality, that life, that existence, that who we are as human beings is both **physical** and **spiritual**, and the Jewish religion of the time of Jesus did not **recognize** that, it was a foreign idea to them. They were **pragmatic, legalistic** and **literalistic** thinkers.

For them only **physical** or **concrete** evidence was convincing, so they cannot grasp the **miracle** at hand because it **contradicts** what they already believe. So, in their self-righteous arrogance they explain it away using their **pre-conceived** and often **toxic certainties!**

This is the **essence** of what **Thomas** said to the disciples, that **only** that which is **seen** and can be **easily and correctly interpreted**, is **real** when in fact, interpretation may be difficult or impossible.

And most certainly **subjective**. Ultimately, this faith question is the same as when Pilate asked Jesus, **“What is truth?”** And Jesus gave no answer because **Pilate**

was incapable of understanding any answer Jesus may have given, because **Pilate** was **blind**.

We know that **perception** is 100% accurate to the holder of it, and no manner of argument will change that.

“Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’”

For me this Gospel is a call to **open my blind eyes** that focus only on that which I already **know** and **believe to be true** because it just might **not be so**. I believe every **prejudice** and judgment of others finds its source in my **blindness**.

The physical blindness that the man in our Gospel story was afflicted with was no one’s fault. **He was born blind, because he was born blind. Life is what it is.** But **Jesus seizes** on the opportunity to teach the **Pharisees** and **us** something we may not have considered.

That we are often **blinded** by our own **certainties**. We have our **beliefs, ideas,** our **opinions,** our **judgments,** and yes, our **delusions**. And we **know** that we are **right**. Except that we are **not**, because we are **blinded** by our **own certainties**.

Throughout his teachings, Jesus confronts us with **choices**. We are **individually** called to open our eyes and to work for justice, compassion and forgiveness. And as the most powerful social justice writing in **Matthew 25**, gives witness, this call to justice is **universal**.

All nations are called to **responsibility**. Not **religions,** not **ideologies,** not **races** or **cultures,** but **everyone!**

In that very context, we **Americans** have yet, as a **people,** to admit and atone for our **genocidal** and **racist** history, the way we treat those whom we see as **inferior** because of the **darkness** of their **skin,** the **language** they speak, the places they **come from** or because they are **women,** or **just plain different from us in some way**.

Our nation and we as a people will never be whole and healthy until we come to terms with our past.

With our blind eyes, we **see people** the way we have been **conditioned** to see them, and we cannot accept that our **perception may be wrong**. And therein lies the **sin of our blindness**.

Last Wednesday evening and this morning we drive the fourth nail with which we crucify Christ, the nail of Toxic Arrogance that causes us to think that we as Christians and Americans somehow better than or superior to others!

AMEN.