

Lent IV

1 Sam 16.1-13; Jn 9.1-38

March 2, 2008

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For the Lord does not see as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance. But the Lord looks on the heart.

These words, spoken by God to Samuel, are both a comfort, and a terror:

The all-seeing, scrutinizing eye of God looks upon our hearts... and what- pray tell- does he find?

Almighty God unto whom all heart are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid.

If that is in fact the case, could not the penetrating eye of God see into the heart of David, on that day, long ago, when the sons of Jesse were lined up for inspection? God rejected the older, the more mature, the valiant and brave brothers... and instead chose a shepherd boy... one so young and inconsequential that he wasn't even present. What was God thinking? Could he not see David's heart?

THIS was the man who would steal Bathsheba from her husband!

THIS was the man who would send Uriah the Hittite to the front of battle to insure his death.

This man's son raped his own sister.

Another son plotted rebellion and civil war.

This man was to be a man after God's own heart?

This man was to be the King?

Well, of course, God saw all those things. Just as he sees all the evil in our hearts. If we were to come to mass this morning pondering only our sinfulness, we would each have to slam our prayerbooks shut and leave in despair.

We would not be able to tolerate his glance. For how could we, like Peter, look across the courtyard into the eyes of the one we have betrayed, and not weep bitterly?

And yet, we stay. We are compelled to stay. Because his forgiveness and love draw us back time and again.

When I am high lifted up on the cross, I will draw all men to myself.

We wrong him, and he forgives.

We curse... He blesses.

We give him a crown of thorns... He gives us the crown of life.

Thank heaven, God does NOT see as man sees!

And that, of course, is the point. Man does not see. In spite of corrective lenses, laser surgery, and the best care ophthalmology can provide, we are indeed short-sighted.

In our Gospel reading this morning, we have the collision of two worlds.

On the one hand, we have the man born blind. In his day, it was simply assumed that this condition was the result

of some notorious sin. Either he or his parents had grieved the Almighty, and this was the consequence. You poke God in the eye and he pokes back. It was just the way the cosmos operated.

We might say that even having such an attitude was indicative of a lack of spiritual insight! But of course, that is the point.

For the Pharisees in this story thought that their sight was quite keen. They were well-educated. They knew all the rubrics and laws. They were proud of their humility, and looked down on any who did not understand as they understood.

Imagine, then, the fireworks, when Jesus took the side of the blind man (as he seemed always to take the side of the underdog). Not only did he heal this man (going against the prevailing notion that he deserved his condition) but he did so on the SABBATH, of all things!

The Pharisees were convinced that this was blasphemy.
Jesus was convinced that he was opening a door to the Kingdom of God.

Now I would submit to you that there are all sorts of Pharisees in the world today, if by "Pharisee" we mean one so blinded by his zealous agenda for God that he misses God entirely.

Those kinds of Pharisees plant bombs and kill the innocent, all in the name of God's righteousness. And we know all too well that that sort is still with us, lurking in the shadows and causing us to stand in long lines and take off our shoes at the airport.

But even in our own, highly secularized western culture, we have rather an ironic twist on an old theme. The Pharisees nouveau of Western culture have their own brand of narrow legalism. They have declared themselves intolerant of intolerance. Not there's anything wrong with that... as Jerry Seinfeld would say...

And in this brave new world, all truth must be equally true. And anything may be challenged except the orthodoxy that... anything may be challenged.

The result of this is that we have created elitist cliques in all of our institutions...political, educational, social and ecclesiastical.

...On the one hand are the newly enlightened. On the other are the proponents of what some call old "Eurocentric Christendom"...(if I may speak in sweeping generalizations). And of course, each side is certain that they and they alone see clearly... and they are equally convinced that their detractors are completely blind (or as William F. Buckley once put it, I will not insult your intelligence by suggesting that you believe what you just said!)

(I must admit, I am a little encouraged this morning by the hope that Mr. Buckley's voice has now been lifted to a realm of higher influence).

But here we are, "stuck" in this impasse, just as those in Jesus' day were "stuck".

And the truth, of course, is that we all really are Pharisees IF we forget that we are sinners... and If we forget that it is only by God's grace that we are healed and given sight.

But thanks be to God, Jesus still comes among us, breaking all the rules... healing on the Sabbath....touching our eyes... giving us a forgiveness and mercy beyond our deserving.

And because he has healed us... it is our responsibility to be an extension of that good news.

God saw the heart of David... and loved him anyway.... And made him King over the people.

The Lord looked into the heart of the Samaritan woman... she who had married five men and was living with a man not her husband... and gave her a new way of seeing... a vision that caused her to leave behind her old life and literally run through the streets telling the news that Messiah had come.

Jesus healed the man-born-blind... knowing that he would be a witness to what he had received.

Jesus heals each of us... and he expects us then to begin seeing others as he sees them.

He wants us to have eyes that are quick to forgive and slow to judge
Eyes that are patient...
Eyes that can spot potential... potential that the world would never see.

For the Lord does not see as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks upon the heart.

+++Amen.