

I Samuel 16:10-13 John 9:1-21

March 15/26

How we see something, what we understand about an event depends largely on the context, doesn't it? What we think, what we conclude about others is conditioned by the setting in which we first meet and later experience them.

It is true that in some ways, we are all blind to certain things, happenings and even people in our lives. We are often preoccupied, sometimes unobservant, perchance careless about noticing that which is right in front of our faces. Add to that all the preconditioning and preconceptions that fill our line of vision - that is, we see what we expect to see.

Samuel expected that God would want one of Jesse's older, stronger sons to be the next king of Israel. With each one, he thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." However, each time he was wrong. Finally, the youngest, the child-like son, David, was brought to him and Samuel couldn't "see" it, couldn't conceive of this one in the role of king. But God could and did, and God spoke to Samuel and gave him new sight so Samuel could see it too.

Then we meet a man who has been blind since birth, a man who is surrounded by people who have serious "vision" problems of their own. Although the physical miracle tends to catch our attention the most, Jesus reaches out to many more than this one man, attempting to give each the sight they needed.

First, the most obvious. There is a man, blind his whole life, near the pool of Siloam. Jesus sees him and in the midst of answering the disciples questions, he makes mud with the dirt of the ground and his own saliva, places the mud on the man's eyes and sends him to wash off the mud, to wash away the blindness in the waters of the pool. We'll come back to this man, but for now, we'll look at the others.

The disciples had their own blind spots - spots from their own conditioning as faithful Jews. In an attempt to understand and explain suffering, people before and in Jesus' day (and, in fact, many still today) believed that if someone had a malady, if someone suffered, it must be because they had sinned, or they had inherited the sins of their ancestors. Given their frame of reference, it's not surprising that the disciples question Jesus about what has caused this man to be born blind. "Is it because of his sins or the sins of his parents?" they ask. Jesus replies that neither of these explanations hold water, that suffering and sin are not necessarily related. He offers them a new perspective - that God's glory can be seen even in suffering. We don't really hear whether the disciples can "see" this or not.

Then there are the religious leaders and teachers of the day who have spent decades studying and learning the "right" way of seeing things, the faithful way of doing things. They "see" that Jesus has broken the Sabbath by healing this man. After all, the blind man's life is in danger. The healing could have waited until tomorrow. He's been blind and a beggar all his life. What possible difference could one more day make? Some of them even doubt the authenticity of the miracle, questioning whether or not this is even the same man, whether or not this particular man was ever blind at all.

Then we get a glimpse at the parents of the once blind, now sighted man. What they see



is how much trouble their son and they could be in if the religious leaders get really angry about this Sabbath healing. When they are questioned about the identity of the healed man, they affirm that he is their son. But when they are questioned about the validity of his healed nature, they back off from the crowd, urging them to put their questions to their son. After all, he's a grown man and can speak for himself, thereby keeping them out of any controversy that might lead to their being thrown out of the synagogue, out of the community.

There's more here, but let's come back to the man himself. Having received the ability to see, for the first time in his life, what exactly does he see? We get to watch as the man comes to terms with what's happened to him. At first, quite simply, we are told, he washes the mud from his eyes and he sees. When the others question him "are you the blind man or not?" he answered, "I am the man." When asked, "how were your eyes opened?" he answers, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and told me to wash in Siloam waters; and I did and I received my sight." Further questions, from the religious officials bring the answer, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see. ... He is a prophet." Later still, the man answers their questions with, "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." Again later, the man vows, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

It's as though the man's sight grows to insight, isn't it? At first glance, he regards Jesus as a "man." Then he describes him as a "prophet". Later, he becomes certain that Jesus is "one" from God." Finally, he comes to know that Jesus is the "Son of man" and he calls him "Lord."

As I have lived with these stories this week, I have found myself examining and re-examining my perceptions of reality, the way I see the world and the people with whom I share this planet. I have asked myself, often, with which of the "characters" in the stories I most closely identify, which one's sight most nearly mirrors my own. It's an important task – this kind of self-examination. I know that I have my blind spots – and that I will continue to have them whenever I fail to see things, events, miracles, people the way God sees them. So, as I journey with these my faith ancestors, I learn a little more about God's vision. I learn to try to see things from Jesus' perspective.

I urge you to do the same; to be open to the sight with which God longs to bless you; to discern, first, at what stage of sightedness you are; and then to trust God to lead you. It begins, perhaps, where it began for the man in John's gospel, with simply being amazed by new sights, by seeing things you've never seen before; then with affirming those sights, telling others what you see; then being open to the insights that always come when we trust God to show us how things look to Him, when we stretch our hearts and minds and vision to see things, people, miracles as God sees them. How would our lives be different, I wonder, if we opened ourselves to see things, everything, through the eyes of Jesus? How would our world be different if we saw every person, **every person**, as Jesus sees them, as those whom he loves enough to die to save?