

Bible Study
Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year A
March 26, 2017

[RCL] 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Those anointed and called to do God's work don't always look and act as we'd expect them to. In this passage from Samuel, Jesse brings forward several candidates for the next king of Israel, all of whom are rejected with the phrase, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Instead, God calls the youngest son, the least likely candidate; the one who is busy with other tasks. The one who no one thought was in the running. The passage demonstrates that God anoints and sends messengers not as mortals see, but as God sees.

- When have you heard the Good News from a source you didn't expect?
- How does a glimpse of a person through God's vision of the heart change our own assumptions about who is called to do God's work? What does this tell us about God?

Psalm 23

Something as familiar as the 23rd Psalm can start to feel almost rote. But, there is so much richness in the theological depiction of a caring, nurturing and providential God contained in the poetic imagery of this psalm. God is our trust, our sustenance, our protector, our benefactor, our ever-present companion and shelter in life. A wonderful lyrical setting of the 23rd Psalm is Marty Haugen's Shepherd Me, O God. Haugen's translation turns this familiar psalm into a prayer for our committed lives of faith, "Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my needs, from death into life." Not only is the setting beautiful, but it moves the words from passive comfort to an aspirational commitment to living fully into the life into which we are called and shepherded by God.

- When has God provided for you in your time of need? How did this change your understanding of God's presence in your life?
- Where do you experience the shepherding of God in your life...either away from harm, or towards a place where your soul can be revived?

Ephesians 5:8-14

If you've ever had the chance to watch a sunrise unobscured by city lights and buildings, one of the most amazing things happens. First, before one even sees the sun emerging over the horizon, the whole sky begins to glow with a pastel, luminescent presence. This pre-dawn beckoning tells us that the night is ending and day is about to dawn. The sun's movement over the horizon is stunning, and often melts the light glow of the pre-dawn into sharp color where it seems that every hue is exposed to its fullness, available for us to use for whatever the new day brings.

This passage from Ephesians can be seen in the same way. The early Church in Ephesus was still emerging. This world had experienced the dawn of the risen Christ and yet wasn't entirely sure how to blend the vibrancy of that light into a world that at times seemed unaware of its brilliance. Paul, writing to the church, encourages and exhorts them to rise from that pre-dawn uncertainty and into the

brilliance of the resurrected Christ by seeking all that is good and right and true which the light has exposed. Once bathed in that light, the way becomes visible with God's help.

- What are your first thoughts when waking? What might happen if you focused your waking energy on that which is good and right and true?
- In what ways does the Light of Christ expose work that needs to be done: in your church, in your community, in the world at large?

John 9:1-41

It seems like whenever something bad happens, our human reaction is to try to pin-point a quick, unilateral cause: Was the person with a cancer diagnosis a smoker? Was there a family history of depression? Who had someone crossed in order to be treated so badly? We can't help jumping to conclusions, mostly because all of us harbor a fear of something tragic happening to us, or to those we love. Having someone or something to blame gives our rational brain something to hang onto so that our emotional heart doesn't have to break a bit more standing in the raw empathy of another person's pain. In short, "blame" can take the place of "love." Today's Gospel is a story of misplaced blame: blame of the person who is blind, blame of his parents, blame of people who seem different; blame of Jesus for extending healing on the Sabbath, rather than following the letter of the law. But, where in this story is love?

The first person to show love in this story is Jesus, who heals the person who was blind, "so that God's works might be revealed in him." Healing occurred so that love could be set free. Isn't that really what healing really does? The second show of love is from that very person who was once blind and now sees: he gives his testimony, and gives glory to God simply and with conviction, "Lord, I believe." This week's lectionary readings are filled with metaphors of light, love, and belief from unexpected places. As this Gospel shows us, we have to ask ourselves the same tough question that the learned Pharisees ask: "Surely we are not blind, are we?" When we allow Jesus Christ to open our eyes, we are healed by the love that is set free. Jesus becomes the light that shines in the darkness, illuminating the path on which we are shepherded, step by step, in God's grace.

- When did you "see the light" about a situation in your own life, or in the world around you? What differed between your first assumptions, and the eventual recognition of truth? Where is God in your own story?
- Jesus sees the potential for God to be revealed in the person who was blind. Drawing on the reading from 1st Samuel from this week, how might God be revealed in those whom we least expect? Through what actions of love might this be revealed?
- Placing ourselves in the position of the person whose sight has been restored, how might the world look through newly opened eyes? Where might God be revealed in this new vision?

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