

Yr. A, Lent 4
March 22, 2020
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church
1196 Words

Lessons: 1 Samuel 16:1-13
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

She slid her right hand across the page of braille—slowly, intentionally—as she spoke the Word of the Lord to our congregation. “The Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on Eliab’s appearance or on the height of his stature.’”

We can’t help it, can we? Appearances *matter* to us. We’re more likely to watch movies featuring beautiful people. We’re more likely to vote for politicians who are taller people. Admit it, we *do* judge books by their covers. Even my attentiveness years ago—hearing Lucy read to the congregation using braille—had something to do with *seeing* her read, not just hearing her.

This morning’s lesson from 1st Samuel is clear, and I quote: “...the Lord does *not see* as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

The sad truth is that for most of us blindness is an *acquired* deficit. We were not born this way. We *choose* what we want to see...and what we don’t. We choose *who* we want to see...and who we don’t. A tall, handsome man with a promise to make our lives better? Of course. A man born blind, begging in the streets to make his life better? No thank you.

All of us can thank God that Christ, the healer, does *not* see things as we see them. Thank God that Christ, the healer, does not see *people* as we see them.

Surely, if there is *one thing* we should be able to see in this current disaster—it is that health care must be universally accessible for our common good. Viruses like this do not discriminate on the basis of race, nationality, gender, wealth, creed, culture, or any of the other distinctions we choose to see.

The poem by Lynn Unger printed on the cover of our worship bulletin challenges us to see *this truth*: “Know that we are (all) connected in ways that are terrifying *and* beautiful. Know that our lives are in one another’s hands.”

And that, dear people, is a lesson straight from the Gospel story of a man born blind. This story is also *our story*. Its relevance to our contemporary lives *cannot* be overstated.

Jesus *saw* a man, a person of worth, a child of God. Everyone else *chose* to see sin and blame. Remember, for most of us, blindness is an *acquired* deficit—we see what we *want to see*; we *don’t* see *who* we don’t want to see.

Now, while everyone else is obsessed with *seeing* who they can blame for the problem, Jesus *becomes* the healer. He actually *does something* for the glory of God and the blessing of someone in need. The Light of the world is shining a caring response for everyone—including *us*—to see.

In the ancient story, the *only* person who can see it...is the man born blind. How about us? How many of us are willing to see *and follow* the example of the Light of the world.

God bless the people who are showing up at the Bloodmobile in our parking lot *this very morning*. They are all *healers who choose to see* the significant need our local hospitals have for blood, and who are following the example of Christ, the healer.

Now, here's something strange in the ancient story: the blind man's community does not recognize him once he is healed. Apparently, they *only saw him* for his blindness. What about us? Who are the people *we* are not seeing, because we are *only* focused on their dis-abilities? What if we changed our view to think of one another's *different* abilities—like Lucy, who had the voice of an angel reading Holy Scripture for all the Church to hear?

God bless all people with *different* abilities who show us how our view of their gifts is too narrow for our own good, and who inspire us to open our minds and see them more clearly...*like God sees them*.

The saddest part of the ancient story is how the man's parents could *see* that their son was healed, but they were also afraid to *recognize* the healer. They were afraid of being rejected. How about us? Are we willing to push against the popular view of our tribe?

God bless Mrs. Frilot from Louisiana who—like most people in her community—thought this was all overblown...*until she didn't*. It appeared this might only be political, until it became *personal*. When her perpetually healthy husband ended up on a ventilator in the ICU, she spoke up publicly and courageously in ways that helped *other* people *see*...that the opposite of health care is health care-*lessness*.

The most pathetic part of the ancient story is how the religious leaders *refused* to see any of the goodness that happened by the hands of Jesus, because it undercut their narrative, and hence, their authority. What about us? Are we willing to change our view about how God works in this world? Are we prepared to recognize, bless, and support the healing work of people with whom we disagree or by whom we feel threatened?

God bless the diverse community of first responders, nurses, doctors, orderlies, and janitorial staff who are serving at personal risk—not only to themselves, but also to their sweet families—in order to help those who are sick and in need. Maybe one day when we get back to having parades and football games, we can set aside some occasions to celebrate *all these courageous people* who help heal us and clean up after us.

I hope this ancient (and timely) story will give you the strength and will to reject some of your acquired blindness and fear. I hope you will feel encouraged to try to see as God sees—*with compassion*.

Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry put it this way in a sermon last week. “Be contagious,” he said, “in loving, in helping, and in healing.” Our leaders here at St. Peter's liked the bishop's challenge so much that we had it printed on banners placed in the Church's front yard as a reminder of exactly what it means to *be the Church* in this world.

Part of what it means, even when we cannot *physically* gather altogether in one place, is to *spread out* and to *live out* the vision of Jesus Christ, the healer. In today's Gospel story Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world.” But he also said to those who follow him—“*You* are the Light of the world.”

Let's trust that he sees us clearly. Let's trust that he speaks truthfully. And let's pray for the vision to follow his example.

Open our eyes, O Lord, to *see your goodness* at work around us...and within us. And then, open our hearts, O Lord, to *see your invitations* for us to love you *by loving our neighbors*. Finally, open our hands, O Lord, to generously share in *your* healing ministry through our prayers...of thought *and* word *and* deed *and* gift.

May we do all this for the glory of your name, and for the blessing of your people—*all people whom you see—with compassion*. Amen.