

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

Psalm 23

Human beings are awesomely made, don't you think? Consider not only how complex we are as individuals in thought and emotion and spirit and personality, but think about how awesome the bodies are that we live in! If General Motors could make an automobile with the same reliability of function that the human body has, they would be the only vehicle manufacturer on the planet. Not only do our bodies work with amazing reliability, but in many cases they self-repair! If we get a cut or a wound or an illness, the body goes to work repairing itself. Amazing!! And most of the information that we get about the world around us comes to us through our bodies. It comes to us through one or more of our five senses: taste, touch, sight, smell and sound. And we are so awesomely made that when one of these senses doesn't work correctly, the other ones get fine-tuned to pick up the slack.

This morning our scripture readings are all about one of those senses: sight and not just physical sight, but insight as well.....being able to recognize and properly identify what we are seeing with our eyes and sometimes what we are feeling with our hearts.

In the Old Testament lesson, God sends Samuel to Jesse in Bethlehem to choose a new king for Israel from one of Jesse's eight sons. When Samuel arrives, only seven of the sons are there, so he takes a look at each one of them. And for each one of them, God says, "No, this is not the one." When Samuel has finished looking them over, he wants to know if these seven are all there are.....and Jesse says, "No, my youngest son, David, is out in the fields tending the sheep." So Samuel says, "Go get him." As soon as Samuel sees David, God says to him "This is the one!" David was young and inexperienced, handsome, but quite slight in physical stature and not at all a sort of 'kingly' looking fellow.....Even so, God says, "He's the one." You see, God looks with the heart and not with the eyes. And sometimes we do that as well. Have you ever met anyone that you didn't think initially was particularly attractive and then you got to know them and you began to realize that they were positively beautiful? That's when you are seeing with your heart and not so much with your eyes! There are lots of different ways of seeing.

The Gospel story about Jesus this morning shows us about different ways of seeing. Jesus and his disciples come upon a man who has been blind since birth. The first thing the disciples want to know is, "Who sinned? Whose fault is this.....this man or his parents?" Jesus tells them neither one.....that there's no connection between sin and physical handicap. But that's not how people saw disabled people in their cultural. They saw any flaw in the human body as

God's punishment for sin. Jesus tells them that's not true.....that they were wrong to see things that way. How often are we wrong in how we see things? And we don't even know it.

Without the blind man saying a word.....or asking for Jesus' help.....Jesus reaches down and picks up a little dirt.....the dust that all of us are made from.....and mixes it with a little spit that is laced with the divine and he puts the mud on the man's eyes. And then Jesus says to him, "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam." Now, because this man has been blind all his life, it's probably true that his hearing is acute. He not only hears Jesus, he obeys.....because on some level he knows whose voice he is hearing. He asks no questions. He doesn't argue. He simply goes.....like a good sheep who has heard his master's voice....and he does as he's told. He washes in the Pool of Siloam.....which is not just any body of water. It is the source of the water that is used in the Temple for Purification Rituals, so this is very special water. And his sight is restored.

The reaction to this man after he gains his sight is almost as important as the fact that he can now see! Jesus has not only given him his sight, he has completely changed his life. People who have known the blind beggar all his life, don't recognize him.....well, he looks sort of like the blind beggar, but I don't know! Jesus has given him far more than just his physical sight.....he has given him abundant new life....and not just in the next world, but in this one. Like the Good Shepherd, Jesus makes him to lie down in green pastures and leads him beside still waters. Jesus revived his soul.

He had been invisible, and now he was seen

He had been pitied and now he had purpose

He had been powerless and now he was filled with a sense of mission

He had been an outcast and now he was the center of attention

He had been silent and now he had found his voice

He had been disregarded and now he was shunned, not for his blindness, but because he could now see Jesus and could see who Jesus is and he said so!

He had been in the dark about many things and now he knew and understood the most important things. As the story unfolds, he goes from identifying himself as the blind beggar to identifying Jesus as a prophet and then to defending Jesus to the Pharisees who have decided that Jesus is most definitely a sinner because he did this miraculous thing on the Sabbath. The blind beggar.....see, we don't even have a name for him.....that's how invisible he was..... He argues that God does not listen to sinners but does listen to one who obeys and worships God and not for all of history has anyone born blind ever before been given their sight. If this man were not from God, he would not have been able to open the eyes of a man born blind. This fellow is absolutely positive about what he has seen.....about what he has heard.....and about

what he has experienced. He trusted not only his senses, but his heart as well. He could see Jesus with his heart!

The Pharisees become so angry with this man that they drove him out.....out of the synagogue and most likely out of town. This man knows who Jesus is. He can now SEE who Jesus is and when Jesus hears that the man has been banished, he reacts like the Good Shepherd that he is. He momentarily abandons his flock and goes to look for the one sheep that is in trouble. When he finds him, he asks him if he believes in the Son of Man. The man does.....and Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man. The man instantly declares his faith in Jesus. He can see now.....really see.....and he can see that Jesus is exactly who his says he is.

Jesus has a few remaining words for the Pharisees when he returns.....and he has those words for us as well. If we are so sure that we see correctly all the time about all things, we are probably blind. If we think we know everything we already need to know.....that we have no need to consider changing our minds.....that we've already got it all figured out.....then we are blind to the interventions of Jesus.

When we are sure we have it all figured out, we block out and exclude Jesus. We don't let him in to a relationship with us. We prevent him from putting mud on our eyes so we can see. We prevent him from transforming us and our lives. We are then blind to the one thing we believe to be the most important thing in our lives.....our relationship with Jesus and with God. If we are not open to changing our minds, if we are not willing to change our perspective, if we have no need of seeing things from another's point of view, then we are blind!! If we can't abandon our tightly held and carefully nursed grudges.....if we can't say "I was wrong and I'm sorry!" or "I forgive you!" and if we don't see ourselves changing as we get older, then we are probably blind. We don't see Jesus trying to heal us. We don't see Jesus trying to open our eyes. We don't *allow* Jesus to open our eyes.....

But to do so, to allow Jesus to open our eyes is to allow Jesus to move into our hearts and to give us not only new sight, but abundant life now.....in this life.....not just in the next. The Lord is my Shepherd.....Jesus is the Good Shepherd and he has come to be among us and to take care of us in all ways and at all times. And he's prepared to give us clear vision if we are willing!

Here's to mud in your eye!!

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.