

4 Lent A – March 22, 2020

Have you heard the story of a man that died and was headed to heaven. At the pearly gates he was greeted by a heavenly being holding a clipboard and a calculator. As the man approached the gates, the gatekeeper said, *“Hold it there, Mister. You can’t just walk in here. We have policies and procedures ... and I need to see your points.”*

The puzzled man said, *“Points? What points?”*

“You know,” the being said, *“the points you earned by the kind of life you lived on earth. You need to have 200 points to get into Heaven. So tell me, what did you do during your life, on earth, that has earned you 200 points?”*

“Well,” the man said, *“I was a member of my church for 47 years. And I was a Sunday school teacher for 32 years.”*

“That’s good,” the gatekeeper said. *“You get one point.”*

“Let’s see ... I was a good husband... a good father ... I think my wife and children would say that.”

“That’s very good,” the being said. *“You get another point.”*

“Oh, my,” the man said. *“Let me think. Well, I tithed to my church and I worked once each month at the soup kitchen. Plus I served four years on the board of the homeless shelter.”*

“Excellent,” the heavenly being said, *“one more point.”*

At this point, the man was getting very worried ... he thought and thought: *What else have I done that would earn points?* In desperation he threw his hands up and said: *“My goodness, if I get in here it will be by the grace of God!”*

“Exactly!” said the gatekeeper. *“That’s worth 197 points. Welcome to heaven!”*

In today’s Old Testament passage, the Prophet Samuel is called to anoint a new king to replace Saul. King Saul had been disobedient to the Lord (1 Sam. 15). And, although Samuel is still grieving over the Lord’s rejection of Saul, he follows God’s command to travel to Bethlehem to anoint a new king from among the sons of Jesse—one who will be fully obedient.

But, since Saul is still king, Samuel fears for his life if Saul discovers what he is about to do. So the Lord tells Samuel to proceed under the pretext of performing priestly duties. When Samuel arrives in Bethlehem, the people are afraid. But he assures them that he comes to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, and invites them to participate.

As seven sons of Jesse are presented to Samuel, none are chosen because the Lord does not see as mortals see: *“the Lord looks on the heart”* (1 Sam. 16:7b). When Samuel asks Jesse if all his sons are present, Jesse replies that his youngest son is keeping the sheep. They send for David. When he arrives the Lord commands Samuel to *“Rise and anoint him; for this is the one”* (v. 12b).

David had not yet reached maturity, and yet God perceived his potential for leadership. *“And the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward”* (v. 13).

One sunny day, on the sidewalk of a busy city street people passing by observed a blind man sitting on the steps of a building. He had an upside down hat by his feet and a sign that read *“I am blind, please help.”*

An advertising executive was walking by him and stopped to observe that he had only a few coins in his hat. So she dropped a few more coins in the hat and, without asking for the blind man’s permission, took the sign, turned it over and wrote another message on it. Then she replaced the sign by the man’s feet and left.

Several hours had passed by, but later that afternoon the advertising executive returned to check on the blind man and noticed that his hat was full of bills and coins. The blind man recognized her footsteps and asked if it was she who had rewritten his sign. He wanted to know "*what did she write on it?*" The executive responded "Nothing that was not true, I just phrased your message differently." She smiled, and went on her way.

The blind man never knew, but his revised sign read "***TODAY IS SPRING AND I CANNOT SEE IT.***"

What do WE see in today's Gospel story of the man born blind? It focuses on different ways of seeing both literally and figuratively. As the passage begins, his disciples ask Jesus, "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" (John 9:2). Their question comes from a long-held but mistaken assumption that misfortune and illness were the result of sin.

Jesus tells the disciples that the "*meaning*" behind this birth defect is "*that God's works might be revealed in him*" (John 9:3). Then, in St. John's Gospel, Jesus goes on to show the us just what his "*revealing the works of God*" means. Anyone who comes to Jesus—who comes to the Great Physician with respect.. open to Grace and Faith—never leaves disappointed.

Healing happens. The blind see. The lame walk. The deaf hear—whether or not they ever see a sunset, or run around the block, or hear the music of a Symphony. In the Presence of the Incarnate God, healing occurs whether or not a cure ever takes place.

This Gospel passage tells us that those who come to Jesus experience salvation, and the sign and symbol of this salvation is healing. Healing is making whole, and that which is made whole is holy. This morning's Gospel makes the point that we constantly need to hear.. (perhaps today, more than in most any other year): **Jesus, is the source of health and salvation in this life**— he is not

only the One who makes everything right in the greater life...when we leave this earth.

St. John, views *faith*, not moral purity, as the opposite of sin. In John's Gospel sickness, disease and death belong to the fallen realm of evil; and Jesus performed more miracles healing people than for any other purpose.

The blind man was completely open and surrendered himself unconditionally to Jesus and his raunchy *saliva and mud remedy*. Then he followed the "orders" of Great Physician and went to wash in the Pool of Siloam (v. 7).

Dear friends in Christ, where is our Pool of Siloam? What is Christ asking of us during this season of fear due to Covid-19? Where is it that God in Christ is calling us to go.. to wash away our blindness to what is really real? Where do we need to go to be healed?

Where is that sacred place where we can splash our faces with the clear water of amazing grace? Each one of us needs to decide this for herself or himself. Where is that "pool of Siloam" for you and me, that person or discipline that will help us deepen our belief in the Lord, Jesus Christ? How might you, or I, give our hearts to the Lord of Life, to Jesus, this very day?