March 22, 2020 • Fourth Sunday in Lent • Online Worship

“Category-Defying Bridge”
Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

John 9:1-7
As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

Dear sisters and brothers, this is the first of our live-stream only worship services. We are so thankful for the technology that makes it possible for us to worship together in this way this morning. Though we cannot all “see” one another in person, as we so love, we can see with the eyes of our hearts this morning. We can sense one another’s presence and rejoice in the love of God that holds us close and binds us together.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

This morning’s Gospel reading brings the story of a man blind from birth. I read just a short passage of the much longer story, which I commend to you. The man was apparently sitting or standing along the road when Jesus passed by. Jesus saw him and simply spat on some dirt, rubbed over the man’s eyes and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. And when he did so, the man could see.

It’s a rather shockingly straightforward story, really, but it seems to prove that old adage that “no good deed goes unpunished.” The man can see. You’d think that would be perceived as a good thing. But as the story continues, all kinds of people seem to take offense. They all have points to make and questions to ask. The disciples ask who was responsible for the man’s blindness. The neighbors ask how he received his sight. The Pharisees ask how Jesus dare heal someone on the Sabbath. Some call the man-born-blind a sinner and insist that sinners surely can’t see. Others keep asking just who this Jesus is, anyway?

John says that they were so divided in all their questioning that they finally turned back to the once-blind man and ask “It was your eyes he opened. What do you say about him?” I think that’s maybe the most important question for all of us this morning, the question we need to ask ourselves. He’s opened my eyes to a variety of kinds of things…so what do I say about him?

The once-blind man in today’s story doesn’t pretend to understand all that has happened to him. But that doesn’t stop him from moving to a profound testimony of faith: “one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.” You see all the while, those detractors all around were finding ways to use their clever questions to justify their lack of faith. In their frustration at their inability to pin Jesus down, they become more and more hostile, more and more angry and finally drive the healed man away.

But through it all, the once-blind man keeps moving closer and closer to Jesus. Each time he answers their questions, his profession of faith goes a little deeper. “Who is this man who opened your eyes?” “A man called Jesus” he tells his acquaintances at first. Then, when questioned by the Pharisees, he replies: he is “a prophet.” When they next accuse him of being Jesus’ disciple, he says: “never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

They drive him out. Jesus goes to him and asks: “Do you believe in the Son of Man? You have seen him and I am that one.” The man replies: “Lord, I believe.”

I know that among us this morning are those who have experienced healing from physical ailments. Among us are those who have experienced healing from addiction. Among us are those who have experienced healing from depression and mental illness. Among us are those who have experienced healing from homelessness and unemployment. Among us are those who have experienced healing from grief. Among us are those who have experienced healing from fear and hopelessness. Among us are those who have experienced healing from broken relationships, broken dreams, broken hearts. Among us are those who have experienced healing in the midst of illness and challenging circumstances.

By our lives, we witness to the healing power of God’s grace within us and all around us. If someone were to ask me, as they sometimes do, what’s really the point of being part of a church, I say that when you come down to it, this is where God’s grace is manifest in this world, in us. This is where God’s love, incarnate in Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, sometimes works miracles that bring healing and restore hope. So let’s hold one another close, now more than ever.

We’re not perfect. And, sure, sometimes, often, we slip into the ranks of those tiresome interrogators all around Jesus who can’t stop snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. But that’s never the best of who we are. We are the church, the people God has called, the people Christ continues to heal and make whole through the saving work of the Holy Spirit. We are those who know that we stand in need of grace and salvation in and through Christ Jesus. Let’s find in these days more time for scripture and prayer.
I believe that as we walk together through this time of the coronavirus, that our eyes will be opened in new ways to people, to faith, and to the world around us. We've all been hampered by a number of what we might call “blind spots.” In these new, strange, thoroughly changed times, we, too, “see” in new ways. We now see our own vulnerability. We see that life isn't really about our own sense of success and control. We see our utter dependence on one another, how we need the many kindnesses of friends and strangers alike. We see into the gift of deeper relationships with our own family members, children, spouses, pets…with whom we’re all of a sudden spending much more time. We see anew the beauty of the morning light, the rainbow in the sky after the rain, the gift of each new day. We see our total interconnectedness—to one another and to God.

In these days, we us draw nearer to one another, nearer to Christ, the physician of life, that our eyes may see his love, our hearts see his blessed hope, that we all may be restored, through him, to newness of life. Be the bridge. Be the hope.

Amen.

Notes: