

“Seeing Servants”

Lent 3: Isaiah 42:14-21, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ. Amen.

I.

A former co-worker of mine, who I worked with when I was in the Air Force in Boston, MA, is a pretty funny guy – in a very sarcastic sort of way. He likes to tell off-color jokes. Sometimes the content is a bit inappropriate, other times it’s not so much inappropriate as it is just plain “wrong” – what we would call politically incorrect. But, he’s also one of the most generous people I’ve ever met in my life as well. I get to see him every summer when I work in the Air Force Reserves. He’s got a problem lately. It doesn’t curtail his humor one bit, but I can tell he’s worried about it. He has macular degeneration. He’s slowly losing his vision. So of course the first question I ask him any time we talk is: “Hey, can you still see?” To which he responds, “Yeah, thanks a lot!” And then we laugh. It’s a fitting way for me to get an update, and he wouldn’t want me to ask any other way.

Now he could be ok for quite some time. Or, tomorrow things could change for the worse in a hurry. It’s unpredictable. He just doesn’t know, and neither do his doctors. But he did tell me this—of all the senses he’d give up, he’d rather give up all of them before losing

his sight. Now perhaps not everyone feels this way, but I'm sure there's quite a few of us, who if we had to choose, would keep our sight before we'd keep our hearing, our taste, our smell, our touch. The truth is, without our sight, we are trapped, imprisoned in a world of darkness, not able to do very much. Now I will say this, there are many blind people in our world who do incredibly amazing things. Pastor Steve Andrus of the Lutheran Blind Ministry has visited St. James on several occasions to preach. Though each time it's been over a year since he's been in our sanctuary, he can still march around our church like he's got 20/20 vision. It's incredible! So I don't mean to say that driven people haven't done incredibly well at overcoming this limitation. But, I'll bet if you asked anyone who is blind if they'd take their sight back, they'd say yes.

Because the truth is – if you are blind, you can't watch TV, or surf the internet, or watch a sports game, or see the beauty of nature, or the beauty of your family's faces. You simply can't serve the way you could if you had the sight God has given to humanity as a way to live and function in our world. For those people who still manage to serve our Lord rather well, despite their limitation of blindness, I have to wonder, what kind of amazing things would they be doing for God's kingdom if they did have their sight!?

II.

Today in our Gospel reading, Jesus gives a man born blind His sight back. This man had never been able to see, and now He does.

Jesus, of course, does this to show that He's truly the Son of God and has the power to do all things. Blindness, like death, and disease, and sickness, is a result of living in a fallen world. And when Jesus comes, He begins to overcome the effects of sin with everyone He encounters. Of course this is all just a bit of a teaser for when He comes again and forever sets everything right again. We aren't supposed to try to spiritualize these accounts of Jesus' miracles. They show us God at work. This man in the story is not meant to be a euphemism for our own spiritual blindness, and how God gives us sight. But yet, there is something interesting about the response of this man once his eyes are opened. He begins to testify about Jesus. People ask him: "How'd this happen?" "Jesus did it!" he answers. When everyone tries to question just why or how this happened, the man says very simply, "this is about what I know—I was blind – now I see – Jesus did it." And the seeing man places his faith in Jesus and worships him.

The reality is, we who know Jesus and worship Him, can only see the truth because our eyes have been opened by Jesus as well. Like this man, we were born blind, with spiritual blindness from the sin with which we came into the world. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians church "once you were in darkness, but now you are in the light, therefore live as children of the light." (5:8). It's good to be able to see.

III.

So then let me ask you this: why do we, who have been given sight, act like blind and deaf servants of God who grope about as if in

the darkness? When we are asked to speak of Christ, why do we so often find ourselves mute and dumb? I suppose this is a typical response of God's people. It sure was to those Isaiah preached to. Listen to what he says to them: "Hear you deaf, look you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messengers I send? Who is blind like you servants of the Lord? You see many things, but you don't pay any attention! Your ears are open, but you don't listen!"

God had given his people a very important task in the world. They who had been redeemed by His mighty hand, were to testify to God in the world. They were to be such a shining example to the nations around them that others would be drawn to join them and worship the true God. God's light had shined on them, allowed them to see the true God and His ways, and they in turn were to be like a bright light shining in a dark world. But rather than use the abilities God had given them, they instead acted like they were blind like every other nation – and instead of serving the Lord, they ran after false idols.

Do you ever resemble Israel? Every one of us here has been redeemed by God. God has brought us into the light, given us eyes to see the truth – given us sight to be His able servants. But what do we do with our sight? Do we use it to proclaim and uplift His name in the world, or do we use it for our own again? Do we run, like the blind, after worthless idols like our money, or our fine clothing, or our fancy cars, or our reputations and popularity? Oh, none of these things are

bad in and of themselves, but the trouble is, they have this funny way of getting in the way of our service to our God. Because we are looking away from the Light in our lives, it gets rather hard to see how we can serve the Lord, and rather than have 20/20 vision for how we serve His kingdom, we grope around in darkness, as if we are blind.

IV.

Paul calls on us today to “wake up.” To arise from our sleep as if we are dead and to allow Christ once more to shine on us, to give us sight and illumine the path before us. God calls on you and I today, not to act as if we are blind. We aren’t to be blind and deaf servants. We are to be seeing servants. He’s given you sight. Use it. No blind person, if given sight, would take it for granted. No blind person, if given sight, would continue to keep their eyes closed and refuse to see! No one who’s been given sight to see and serve Jesus should walk around in darkness.

We are the church. We are the remnant in the world, the very few who can know the truth. We are the few who know Gods’ will for us and have been given the power of the Holy Spirit to walk in it. Just like God’s people of old, we are to let our light shine so that others may praise our Father in heaven and come to know the truth. We have the same mission, to live in such a way that all nations are drawn to the cross of Christ and saving faith in Him. Don’t be a blind and deaf servant. Don’t spurn the gifts God has given you. Even today, begin to think about how you can use your sight to see new and exciting ways

to be a servant of the Lord in the places God has called you. As you look ahead, the way might still seem dark. You might still feel like you are blind as you begin to walk. But know God goes before you with this promise: that he will “lead the blind by ways they have not known, guiding them along unfamiliar paths, turning the rough places smooth, and turning the darkness into light.” (Isaiah 42:16). As you seek to serve Him as a “seeing servant” – He promises never to forsake you, but rather to shine upon you. Once you were blind, but now you see. Go then, in peace, and with your sight, serve the Lord.