**Though I was blind, now I see**

March 19, 2023; Fourth Sunday in Lent; RCL Year A

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

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***The King of Love my Shepherd is,***

***Whose goodness faileth never;***

***I nothing lack if I am his, and he is mine forever.***

***In the name of God~ Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.* Amen*.***

Something that gives me great joy when thinking or talking about scripture is noticing the connections between stories and then weaving those threads into a pattern of deeper and richer understanding. Two weeks ago, we remembered together that Light has been part of our stories since the very beginning- that God is not only the creator of light in the world but is the Light- and thus Light has come to be associated with all that is holy and good. When the language of holy scripture says that as God’s people we are called to walk in the Light, it means that we need to intentionally invite the light of Christ to illumine the darkness of our world and of our own hearts- through our words, our actions, our whole way of being.

Today’s readings are not only about whether we are walking in light and or in darkness but also how we choose to **see**- whether it is with our limited human perception or with the expansive vision of God. God commands Samuel to ‘see’ Jesse’s sons in a different way- not looking at their outward strength or rank in the family system but saying instead: “The Lord looks on the heart.” In our beloved twenty-third psalm “the valley of the shadow of death”, a place of darkness and fear, is made safe by God’s protection and care; the darkness that is all around us is kept at bay as God shepherds us towards the light. Paul’s language in today’s epistle is clear and direct: “Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of the light, for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them…for everything that becomes visible is light.” And we already know that in John’s Gospel “night” or “darkness” is not only a place where people cannot ‘see’ and things happen that do not belong to the light, but also when the characters in the story are not yet fully able to ‘see’ or understand the gift of the Light being offered to them. As did the man who was born blind, we too have a choice about how we see: ***we either embrace a new life of learning how to see as God does and spread the truth about the source of this healing Light, or we allow the darkness and brokenness of our world to continue to overcome us.***

One of the hallmarks of John’s Gospel is that when Jesus arrives on the scene in a story and enters the lives of the people-and this is also true in our own lives- everything changes in ways that seem almost too incredible to be true. Scarcity turns to abundance with the One who can turn water into wine. We can be reborn into light and new life by the gift of the Holy Spirit at any age, as we hear in the story of Jesus and Nicodemus. Any human divisions or our past history melts away in the presence of the One who knows everything we have ever done and still offers us living water. And when Jesus heals a man who was born unable to physically see our understanding of ‘seeing’ is turned completely on end-the people who pride themselves on their human way of seeing ***but cannot accept that new life and wholeness comes from God whenever and however God chooses- they are that are the ones who cannot truly see.***

As with so many scripture stories, it is so easy to read this story on just a surface level: The man was born unable to see, Jesus gives him the gift of his sight. The other characters in the story cannot accept either that this is the same person or that his healing is of God- of light and not of darkness, and so they are the ones who are blind. We understand that physical sight functions here as a metaphor for spiritual sight (and also that this conversation in no way belittles anyone who is truly visually impaired.) And yet, there is always a moment when we are pulled into the deepest heart of these stories and have the choice- as do the characters themselves- of finding our way to the truths that are so filled with light that the darkness can never overcome them.

The man who has regained his sight witnesses that his healing is of God as he says “Lord, I believe” and worships Jesus, yet the religious leaders and even his own parents remain spiritually blind, unable to believe or take the risk of proclaiming that his new way of seeing is of God.  They cannot accept- or truly see- either this man that they have known for so long or the lifegiving truth of his story as he tells it. They wonder instead what he or his parents did to deserve this; they criticize Jesus for healing on the sabbath and because of this they declare that the healing is not of God; they hesitate to take a stand for the truth for fear of being kicked out of the synagogue for following Jesus. They push the man for answers he isn’t sure he has until finally he grows impatient with them and tells them: ***“One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”*** He is finally able to ‘see’ Jesus for who he is- the Son of Man sent to bring Light to all humanity- as he proclaims through his worship that this gift of new sight can only come from God.

Blindness and sight can now take on the fullness of their meanings- it is a blindness of our souls rather than our eyes when we fail to see and share God’s healing and wholeness and the Source from which they come. God’s gifts of new life in all their fullness are always surprising and never limited by human rituals or institutions, such as healing on the sabbath day, and human enemies cannot destroy the rich abundance of God’s gifts to God’s people, as psalm 23 teaches us. When we choose to see ourselves as limited by our places that need healing- ***and we all have them***- when we can’t see the places of new life and transformation that are being born in others- when we don’t give God the glory for all we have been given- than we stay in the darkness and are not walking towards the light. If we learn nothing else from today’s Gospel we need to hold fast to this: ***If Jesus had given him this man his sight, but he had not gotten to that place where he could say “Lord, I believe” and worship Jesus, then he too would have still been blind.* And so it is also with us.**

Beloveds, the challenge for each one of us is to discover our own places of spiritual blindness, those spaces of darkness that hold us back from seeing ourselves and others as God sees us. How do we let go of our human tendency to not recognize the transformative love of God as the place from which all streams of living water flow? How can we work to let go of our belief that we have done something wrong to deserve the darkness in our lives and God is punishing us, or that we are somehow not worthy of these gifts of sight and new life that are so freely offered to us? ***How do we keep leaning into our call to proclaim the healing love of God, a God who longs for each of us to be freed from everything that blinds us, declaring to all the world that everything good and life-giving and true always, always points back towards God?***

Our lives are fleeting, and our acts of mercy and care that come from true sight cannot be put off until tomorrow. Heal now- love now- give thanks now and always to the One who walks with us and protects us and draws us always deeper into God’s presence. Our Shepherd tenderly cares for us, offering us healing and protection and an eternal place of love and belonging- so when darkness surrounds us and threatens to separate us from the true Light, we know that we need not be afraid.

***And so through all the length of days***

***thy goodness faileth never:***

***Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise within thy house forever.* Amen*.***