

**FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT 3/22/20**

**1 SAMUEL 16:1-13; PSALM 23; EPHESIANS 5:8-14; JOHN 9:1-41**

**GOOD MORNING -**

**THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT IS SOMETIMES KNOWN AS LAETARE SUNDAY (LAETARE MEANS REJOICE) OR MOTHERING SUNDAY. BECAUSE FORMERLY THE FAITHFUL USED TO MAKE THEIR OFFERINGS IN THE CATHEDRAL OR MOTHER CHURCH ON THIS DAY. IT IS A NAME STILL KEPT UP IN SOME REMOTE PARTS OF ENGLAND, THOUGH THE REASON FOR IT HAS CEASED TO EXIST. THERE IS PROBABLY A CONNECTION HERE WITH ANCIENT SPRINGTIME CELEBRATIONS OF MOTHER EARTH AND THE MIRACLE OF NEW LIFE AND EARTH'S HOPE FOR SURVIVAL.**

**THE CHURCH'S LITARGY ON THIS THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT, INVITES US TO RETRACE ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL DYNAMICS OF OUR BAPTISMAL RE-BIRTH THROUGH THE GOSPEL ACCOUNT OF THE HEALING OF THE "MAN BORN BLIND." THE SIXTH OF THE SEVEN SIGNS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN. IS BEAUTIFULLY COMPOSED OF SEVEN DISTINCT SCENES.**

AS THE PASSAGE BEGINS, THE DISCIPLES ASK JESUS, “RABBI, WHO SINNED, THIS MAN OR HIS PARENTS, THAT HE WAS BORN BLIND?” THEIR QUESTION COMES FROM A LONG HELD BUT MISTAKEN ASSUMPTION THAT MISFORTUNE AND ILLNESS WERE CAUSED BY SIN. MANY IN THIS WORLD TODAY STILL BELIEVE THIS MYTH.

JESUS REPLIES THAT ALTHOUGH SIN IS NOT THE CAUSE OF THE MAN’S BLINDNESS, HIS CONDITION PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVEAL THE LIFE-CHANGING POWER OF GOD THAT MUST BE MANIFESTED NOW. AS LONG AS JESUS IS IN THE WORLD, HE IS THE TRUE HEALING LIGHT; BUT WHEN JESUS IS NO LONGER WITH THEM, THIS WORK WILL CONTINUE THROUGH HIS DISCIPLES.

IN A DRAMATIC DEMONSTRATION OF GOD’S HEALING POWER, JESUS, “SPAT ON THE GROUND, MADE MUD WITH THE SALIVA, AND SPREAD THE MUD ON THE MAN’S EYES”. IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, SPIT WAS COMMONLY BELIEVED TO HAVE MEDICINAL PROPERTIES. THE VISION OF THIS IN TODAY’S “POLITE” WORLD CAUSES SOME TO TURN AWAY AT THE THOUGHT, AND THEREBY LOSES ITS MEANING.

JESUS THEN TELLS THE MAN TO GO AND WASH IN THE POOL OF SILOAM. THE MAN DOES AS JESUS INSTRUCTS HIM AND IMMEDIATELY IS ABLE TO SEE. SILOAM MEANS "SENT" OR "SENT ONE." IN THE CONTEXT OF THE STORY, THE MAN IS HEALED NOT BY THE WATER OF SILOAM, BUT BY THE "SENT ONE" JESUS.

HOWEVER, THIS MIRACLE IS NOT CAUSE FOR REJOICING AND AMAZEMENT. THE BLIND MAN'S NEIGHBORS DISCOUNT THE HEALING, SAYING THAT THIS IS NOT SAME MAN. DISBELIEF CAN CAUSE SOME STRANGE REACTIONS! NEVERTHELESS, THE MAN DECLARES THAT HE *IS* THE SAME PERSON THEY SAW BEGGING AND HE DESCRIBES HOW JESUS GAVE HIM SIGHT.

WHEN THE MAN IS TAKEN BEFORE THE PHARISEES TO TELL HIS STORY THE RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES TAKE ISSUE WITH THE FACT THAT THE HEALING TOOK PLACE ON THE SABBATH. THEY INSIST THAT NO ONE WHO TREATS THE SABBATH IN SUCH A CASUAL WAY CAN BE FROM GOD. BUT THE HEALED MAN HAS PROGRESSED IN HIS UNDERSTANDING AND HE NOW DECLARES TO THE

PHARISEES THAT *JESUS IS A PROPHET*. WHAT I SEE HERE IS AN OBVIOUS RUSE TO TAKE AWAY THE THOUGHT THAT JESUS PERFORMED A MIRACLE! DON'T WE SEE THAT SOMETIMES, TODAY, WHEN SOMEONE TRIES TO COVER A TRUTH? .... NOT MUCH IN THIS WORLD HAS CHANGED.

THE PHARISEES ARE CONCERNED THAT THE TESTIMONY OF THE MAN AND HIS HEALING MAY SET A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT. ALTHOUGH THE MAN'S PARENTS AFFIRM THAT HE WAS BORN BLIND, THEY DO NOT KNOW HOW HE HAS BEEN GIVEN SIGHT. THEY ARE AFRAID OF THE AUTHORITIES, AND REFUSE TO BECOME INVOLVED.

IN VERSES 24-34, THE PHARISEES AGAIN QUESTION THE MAN IN HOPES OF DISCREDITING HIM. THEY INSIST THAT GLORY SHOULD BE GIVEN TO GOD ALONE, AND NOT TO JESUS. WHEN ASKED YET AGAIN TO DESCRIBE WHAT HAPPENED, THE MAN UNSETTLES HIS QUESTIONERS BY ASKING IF THEY WISH TO HEAR THE STORY AGAIN BECAUSE THEY TOO WANT TO FOLLOW JESUS. THE PHARISEES REPLY BY REVILING THE MAN AND CLAIMING TO BE DISCIPLES OF MOSES, WHOM THEY KNOW TO BE GOD'S TRUE SPOKEMAN.

THE HEALED MAN MARVELS AT THE IGNORANCE OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND POINTS OUT THAT NO ONE COULD PERFORM SUCH A MIRACLE WITHOUT BEING FROM GOD. BECAUSE THE MAN DEFENDS A PERSON THE PHARISEES HAVE IDENTIFIED AS A SINNER, THE PHARISEES DECLARE THAT THE FORMER BLIND MAN IS A SINNER OF EQUAL DEGREE, AND DRIVE HIM AWAY.

WHEN JESUS HEARS WHAT HAS HAPPENED, HE SEEKS OUT THE MAN AND ASKED HIM “DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE SON OF MAN?” WHEN THE MAN ASKS FOR FURTHER CLARIFICATION, JESUS REPLIES WITH WORDS SIMILAR TO HIS SELF-REVELATION TO THE SAMARIAN WOMAN – “YOU HAVE *SEEN* HIM, AND THE ONE SPEAKING WITH YOU IS HE.” THE MAN RESPONDS, “LORD I BELIEVE” AND DEMONSTRATES HIS BELIEF BY WORSHIPPING HIM.

JESUS GOES ON TO SAY THAT, HE BRINGS JUDGEMENT BECAUSE THERE ARE THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO BELIEVE – TO SEE- AND THOSE WHO DO NOT. THROUGH THEIR ARROGANT CLAIMS OF KNOWLEDGE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS THE PHARISEES DEMONSTRATE THEIR BLINDNESS, BRING

JUDGMENT UPON THEMSELVES. JESUS POINTS OUT THAT THEIR REFUSAL TO ADMIT THEIR OWN SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS WAS WORSE THAN ACTUALLY *BEING* BLIND. “NOW THAT YOU SAY, ‘WE SEE,’ YOU’RE SIN REMAINS’.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON, ANOTHER WAY OF SEEING IS ILLUSTRATED AS THE PROPHET SAMUEL IS CALLED TO TRAVEL TO BETHLEHEM TO ANOINT A NEW KING FROM AMONG THE SONS OF JESSE AS A REPLACEMENT FOR SAUL. 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. HOWEVER, HE ASSURES THEM THAT HE COMES TO OFFER A SACRIFICE TO THE LORD, AND INVITES THEM TO PARTICIPATE.

AS SEVEN SONS OF JESSE COME BEFORE SAMUEL, NONE ARE CHOSEN, BECAUSE THE LORD DOES NOT SEE AS MORTALS SEE: “THE LORD LOOKS ON THE HEART”. WHEN SAMUEL ASKS JESSE IF ALL HIS SONS ARE PRESENT, JESSE REPLIES THAT HIS YOUNGEST SON IS KEEPING THE SHEEP.

WHEN THIS SON, DAVID, ARRIVES, THE LORD COMMANDS SAMUEL TO “RISE AND ANOINT HIM; FOR THIS IS THE *ONE*”.

ALTHOUGH DAVID HAD NOT YET REACHED MATURITY, THERE WAS IN HIM A POTENTIAL FOR LEADERSHIP PERCEIVED BY GOD. “AND THE *SPIRIT* OF THE LORD CAME MIGHTILY UPON DAVID FROM THAT DAY FORWARD”.

PSALM 23, TRADITIONALLY ATTRIBUTED TO DAVID, CELEBRATES THE MERCY AND CARE OF GOD – QUALITIES ALSO WE ASSOCIATE WITH THE IDEAL SHEPHERD AND KING. I COULD PROBABLY SAY A GREAT DEAL MORE, AS THIS WAS THE FIRST BEDTIME PRAYER I WAS TAUGHT AND THE MEMORIES AND CONFORT THIS “PRAYER” HAS GIVEN ME OVER THE YEARS IS INDESCRIBABLE – “SURELY YOUR GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER.”

CONTINUING THE THEME OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS REMINDS THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS THAT THEY NO LONGER LIVE IN DARKNESS “BUT NOW IN THE LORD YOU ARE LIGHT. LIVE AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT”.

**THEY WILL DISCOVER WHAT IS PLEASING TO THE LORD, ASSOCIATING THEMSELVES WITH WHAT IS “GOOD AND RIGHT AND TRUE”, WHILE REJECTING AND EXPOSING THE “UNFRUITFUL WORKS OF DARKNESS”. THROUGH THEIR FAITHFUL LIVES, SUCH DISOBEDIENCE IN THE WORLD WILL BE EXPOSED AND ULTIMATELY REDEEMED. THE LIGHT IS GOD’S GIFT THAT GUIDES AND STRENGTHENS US ALL.**

**I WANT TO LEAVE YOU WITH A VERY SHORT STORY ABOUT BLINDNESS: FOOD FOR THOUGHT!**

**ONE SUNNY MAY DAY IN CENTRAL PARK, A BLIND MAN WAS SEEN TAPPING FOR ATTENTION WITH HIS CANE AND CARRYING ON HIS CHEST A SIGN: “HELP THE BLIND.”**

**NO ONE PAID MUCH ATTENTION TO HIM. A LITTLE FURTHER ON ANOTHER BLIND BEGGAR WAS DOING BETTER. NEARLY EVERY PASSERBY PUT A COIN IN HIS CUP, SOME EVEN TURNING BACK TO MAKE THEIR CONTRIBUTION.**

**HIS SIGN READ: “IT IS MAY – AND I AM BLIND.” AMEN**