

“THE BLIND BEGGAR SEES THE LIGHT”

A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 26, 2017

Text: John 9:1-41

“Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light.” (Ephesians 5:8)

I hope you have spent some time this season contemplating the photos which surround us, photos of your hands and mine. The hands are empty and open. They are the hands of Christians, asking God for “a little something”: For a blessing. For faith. For hope. For love. For peace.

These are the hands of Christians at worship, especially. Our hands may be full all week long, as we do what we have to do, as we take care of business. But here we do not come to take care of any business or to do something we have to do. We come here only asking. We gather with other beseechers because we know that our Lord is both mighty and merciful, and hears the cry of his people. We come not only to ask for favor for ourselves, but also for others, for the whole world. We sing, we pray, not to prove anything to God but only to praise the Lord, the giver of life, and to ask for life, which is his to give.

Today, God feeds us a story about a man who represents all of us. He begins chapter 9 a blind beggar sitting by the side of the road, hearing people walk by. People who have lives. He calls out to them to have mercy on him and give him some coins.

We do not identify with him, of course. We naturally identify with the disciples of Jesus. They saw the pathetic beggar and used him as a conversation piece. “Jesus, does he deserve to be like this?”

Deserve. We love that word. We see someone truly unfortunate, and we wonder how they got there. Did they have it coming? Didn't they pay attention in school? Did they do drugs? Are they criminals? Is it

their parents' fault? Were the parents bad? How did that person come to be like that? Is it society's fault? What can you say, when someone is blind from birth?

We want to know why. Not necessarily because we're going to do something about it. Perhaps because if we can chalk it up to something, we won't feel so bad? I don't know what the disciples were thinking. But their question was “who is to blame?”

We identify with the disciples. John wants us to identify with the beggar.

We don't identify with Jesus, because he's doing a miracle now. He is going to show what God does, he says. “This man was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.” Jesus is putting mud on the man's eyes, which is ridiculous, and telling him to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam, which is puzzling. So, even though we should identify with Jesus, since we are the Body of Christ and his hands in the world today, we don't. Not yet. Jesus hasn't told us yet that we are “the light of the world.” For now he is only calling himself the “light of the world.” That's all right. There would be a lot of expectations with being “the light of the world,” so let's not identify with Jesus. Not yet.

They get separated, the man goes off and washes his eyes and sees, but we're on another street. Then the man who used to be a beggar gets in trouble for not being blind anymore, because God's works were revealed in him on the Sabbath. He gets in trouble with people who identify with God, obviously, because they are about to pronounce God's judgment on somebody who broke God's law. They are really upset. “This man (Jesus),” they say, “is not

from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath. We're sure about this."

Jesus is "Not from God"? That's rich. In chapter one of John, we already found out that Jesus was from God, and in chapter 13 we will hear that Jesus' time had come to "depart from this world and go [back] to the Father." It's hilarious that these gentlemen know where Jesus is not from.

But the erstwhile beggar makes fun of them on this point. When they admit they don't know where Jesus is from, he pretends to be dumbstruck: "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he came from, and yet he opened my eyes. . . . If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

That did it. They told him "You were born entirely in sin." (Remember, that's what the disciples had wanted to know?) And they drove him out.

"You were born entirely in sin"?

The stories of John play off each other. We understand this one better if we think about Nicodemus. He went to Jesus, and Jesus told him he needed to be born again. (Because, apparently, everybody—even Nicodemus is born entirely in sin.)

Today, a blind beggar who was born wrong somehow, never mind exactly how, shows what it is to get born all over again. He is no longer darkness, he is light—to quote from Paul's reading. To use John's term, he receives power to become a child of God, born of God.

The story of Jesus at the well also informs this story. In this blind beggar who washes in the pool of Siloam there begins to gush up a living water unto eternal life.

We may have thought it a bad idea, or even impossible, to identify with a beggar when we heard this story begin. But how do we feel now?

Maybe like going back to the beginning and sitting by the side of the road and singling out Jesus to say

to him, "Lord, have mercy on us, too. The same mercy you had on the blind beggar in Jerusalem. The same mercy you showed to everyone who ever said to you, 'Kyrie, eleison.' Let us have a little, too." Or, as the woman at the well said, "Sir, give me this water."

Chapter 9 of John is our own backstory, if we will look to Jesus for life and peace and wholeness.

Going forward, we should look to Ephesians 5, which tells our future..

"Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light."

I found one translation which got this all wrong. They made it say "Once you "lived in the" dark, but now the Lord has "filled you with" light."

Shame on those translators for watering it down. Paul says "Once you were darkness, but now—in the Lord—you are light."

You **are** light.

The light of Christ is not a flashlight we use to go where we want to go, do what we want to do. It is a light which we become, by his Holy Spirit. (Jesus always said things like "My peace I give to you," and "My spirit I give to you," etc. Believe it or not, in John 14:2 Jesus said "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.")

I thought it was strange, at first, when I saw the pictures of our hands. I was surprised by the black background.

But now I see it differently. Set against the darkness, our hands become themselves light. They shine on us, and remind us we were once darkness, but now we are light.

Jerusalem beggar, Bethlehem people, live as children of the light. Amen.