



The Fourth Sunday of Lent (A)
March 22, 2020
John 9:1-41
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

When I'm at my desk in my office at St. Mark's, I peer out to see one of the great and beautiful towers of the Church, the one with the 1300-pound bell in it. I also see straight down Pearl Street. I have to admit that I love the towers of St. Mark's. They are unlike any towers I have seen before and are topped by golden crosses.

These days, I'm not at my desk at St. Mark's, as you probably know. At least, I am rarely at my desk, as we are to work from home to keep safe and to help others to be safe.

From my living room window of my condo, I look out on to a great ravine with lots of trees. The ravine provides a passageway for Plaster Creek, a modest creek that even after days of rain is still just a modest flow of water at least where I live. I do have a tower of sorts, a tower which is my bird feeder. I kept the feeder filled all winter long. Yellow finches have returned amidst a variety of other small birds of various colors.

Thinking of contrasting the view from my condo with that of the view from my office window, I can only begin to imagine what not being able to see might feel like. Whether outside with the sounds of nature and now a few sounds of early spring or the sounds of downtown buses and cars or wherever else, hearing is a great gift and certainly is that of sight.

Today's Gospel, a lengthy and complex passage starts off with the text of a "man born blind". That tells us straight away that the man had never seen the world in which he lived. No doubt, he was very much dependent on his parents and others to be his eyes, to open doors of experience for him, to help protect him from the dangers of rugged paths dotted with rocks and uneven surfaces and to be his support when he needed it most.

The miracle of giving sight to the 'man born blind' is yet another powerful miracle attributed to Jesus who uses the situation to teach which is often the case. The story includes the belief that such challenges as being born blind may had to do with the sins of one's ancestors.

In the Gospel passage, the back and forth exchange must surely have created an extremely tense environment for the man now with sight for the first time. Perhaps, the exchange enables the reader to better appreciate that just because the man's sight was given to him, he was not given an instant dose of faith.

The man says to the those questioning him, "Tell me that I may believe in him". Jesus says to him: "the one speaking with you is he". The man's response? "Lord, I believe."

These days of isolation, I'm finding it difficult to find anything positive with the tragic circumstances, suffering and deaths surrounding the Corona Virus. On one level, I am seriously disturbed by the news, the heartache, the confusion, the anxiety and loss of familiar work places, learning environments, neighborhood restaurants and the loss of life. I miss our beloved St. Mark's and look forward to worship there again in the future.

I find it very difficult to see where God is in the midst of this pandemic gripping the world in ways that we have not seen before. Yes, there are comparisons with the Spanish Flu of 1918 but we were not alive then. Yes, there are comparisons with the Great Stock Market Crash of 1929 but no one alive today was an adult to have remembered that event.

We are in what can be described as a liminal time in life, a time between what we knew just a couple of months ago, what we are currently experiencing and what may be the outcome in the future. We can recall the past as we experience almost timeless days of staying inside to try and keep ‘social distance’ from others. We can only imagine what the weeks ahead have in store for us. Today, I learned that no clergy person will be allowed in any Spectrum Health facility for any reason whatsoever, an unprecedented decision for the healthcare system.

What can today’s Gospel say to us as we search for meaning, for life, for comfort and for peace in the midst of a kind of turmoil we have not known before? Maybe, St. Paul can be of help.

Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians tells us that “We walk by faith and not by sight”. (2 Corinthians 5:7) As people of faith, we may be blinded by the circumstances in which we find ourselves, the inconveniences of today, those sick today and those dying from the Virus but we are called to be people of hope. We are called to walk with the belief that through it all, God is with us and with those suffering throughout the world.

The realist in me says that my faith and perhaps your faith is challenged. How easy and yet poignant is the question, “Where is God in all this?”. Where was God at the crucifixion? God was on the cross at the crucifixion, as God in Jesus suffered pain and died.

As people of the Resurrection, we believe that Jesus was not only on the cross for our salvation but rose from the dead that we might have life. The cross of the Corona Virus is crippling the world in which we live, and we will perhaps be forever changed.

Perhaps in our prayer, we might ask God to reveal to us what we are to learn about ourselves and the world in which we live during this time of life. Do we not need understanding, comfort and peace in the midst of anxiety, confusion and suffering?

Perhaps, we are being challenged to invite God into our lives in ways like never before. I would be a fool to think that that is an easy task; It is not easy but for sure is worthwhile. We can learn a deeper appreciation for God’s presence if we open our eyes to that presence and see beyond the darkness around us.

God’s grace, the light of God’s love in Jesus, is with us, in us and all around us. We are not alone. We are united to one another in Christ Jesus. Let us invite Jesus to help us carry the crosses of life and bring us to resurrection life. Amen.