

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Across this season of Lent, we have had the opportunity to join with Adam and Eve...with Moses and the Hebrew tribes....and even with Jesus himself. To a varied extent, we are all faced with the urging from the Spirit to join them on our own personal journeys into the wilderness. To go into places of unfamiliarity. Of being challenged. Of uncertainty. Of re-evaluation. Of....Lent!

Why? You may recall the self-revelations of God that we shared earlier in Lent.

We considered that Jesus...along with the others in scripture...were led into their particular versions of “the wilderness”...not because they were sinners, or bad people, or born unclean, or any of that stuff...but rather to ponder the extent to which they would live into the intention of God for humanity to be holy...to be a child of God.

If you remember, we hold onto the basic biblical truth of our very existence...that God did not...and does not..intend for us to be “partially holy.” Being made in the image of God...as Genesis tells us...means that our “default setting” (if you will) is that we are of holy stuff. That the very core root of our DNA...that part which science has not yet “discovered”....is we **are** holy by our nature.

But, at best, we only live into a marginal part of our innate holiness. And, the life of Jesus shows us that a human being can be **all-the-way-holy**. Again, the story of the Incarnation is a story about living shamelessly into the image that God told us we could claim as our own.

With that basic understanding, in this Lenten season, we began to take away the figurative fig leaves behind which Adam and Eve hid in leaving the garden. We started to think about what and how we cover up the glory, beauty, joy, and truth of who we are...all to live without shame as embodiments of holiness of God. And, with that long introduction of who we are on this planet, and why we are on this journey together....you and I...we come back to today’s gospel story from St. John. We come back to Jesus...and the blind man.

To tie in this story with the great message from God to us, it might be helpful to understand a common thread passing throughout this gospel. And that...is the symbol of light. It starts with the fourth verse (“In him was life, and the life was the light of the world”) right through the last words of Jesus before the Passover: “The light is with you for a little longer . . . While you have the light believe in the light, that you may become children of light” (12:35-36).

So, what is the big deal about light? Here, in the 21st century, we can be literally flooded with light.

Artificial light within our instant control. We take it for granted. About the only time I think about electricity is when I do not have it. When the power goes off, especially in the evening. We light candles throughout the house...to help us see in the dark. Light allows us to see in the dark. John is a great storyteller with a gift for character development....the development of character not only of those in the story, but also of the hearer or the reader. We are invited to explore...not only in seeing Jesus as the discerning light from God which illuminates and reveals...but also how we can actually be transformed, to know ourselves as light-bearers for the world.

In this story, we see the man born blind turning into the icon of all we are called to be as Christians.

This fellow shows us how it is done. His miracle is our miracle. What makes the story so exciting is that as the man makes each choice, he is seeing himself, revealing the image of God within him. Step by step, the image emerges as the man chooses a new way of being in the world. The purpose of the miracle is not to give him the ability to pick out red from green, or me from you, but to give him the ability to distinguish truth from illusion.

The first step this man takes on that new path is **obedience**. Jesus puts clay on his eyes and sends him to the pool of Siloam to wash.

The word “Siloam” literally means “sent” and, like most of the word plays in John’s gospel, this one has many layers: Jesus is **sent** to be a living incarnation of God’s love. The blind man is **sent** to Jesus so that God’s works may become visible to the people. The man is **sent** by Jesus to the pool to complete the healing. In each case, the response to the sending is obedience, because without obedience no transformation...or miracle...can happen.

Second, the man born blind steps into a place of personal witness. The religious authorities call the man before them to “throw light” on the events, but when he does so by declaring that Jesus is a prophet, he also throws the entire status quo into turmoil. The establishment does not really want truth. They want affirmation of what they know to be safe and familiar.

His witness and conviction reveals the conflict lurking among the priests themselves. Against the man’s certainty, the anxiety of the priests is exposed by the light in sharp contrast. The Pharisees send for the man’s parents and his neighbors. In an increasing spiral of violence, they harass and threaten. Call the man back, and resort to abuse and insult. Finally, they throw him out of the religious community! For what reason? On what charge? He was made whole!

We lose the point if we simply dismiss the religious authorities as evil. Everyone in this story is acting from conviction and with good intentions, but there is a critical difference. The man born blind is willing to acknowledge his blindness and, therefore, his need for clear sight. The Pharisees are so sure that

their sight is perfect that they become blind to everything but their expectations. The transformation of the blind man comes from his ability to see what actually is, not merely what he wants or expects. He becomes a light-giver himself simply by holding true to the truth he sees. This makes an articulate, authoritative, and accurate witness.

The third step the man born blind chooses is a **humility** that hides nothing. He stands completely exposed when all the focus is on him. He does not become self-important. Makes no huge claims about his healing, but he also will not change his testimony to please the priests. He does not claim the miracle to his own righteousness, and he does not judge Jesus one way or the other. He speaks the truth and he continues to speak the truth simply because it is the truth, and thus prevents the Pharisees from rewriting the story to suit themselves.

This is not only humility; but courage of the highest order. He has nothing to gain and everything to lose. He cannot expect to be cared for by Jesus if his own community turns against him. He can look for nothing better than to be an outcast, but he will not change his story. His transformation continues when Jesus next appears. He is not angry at his treatment of being thrown out. Lays no blame at the feet of Jesus. Asks no favor. With his world turned upside down, he never loses his spiritual balance, because he is able to perceive himself (and, therefore, others) in proper perspective to God. He recognizes in Jesus the very image of God, because he can finally see himself as an image of God.

This story gives us the opportunity to name our own blindness, our own places of being “out of focus.” The good news here is that the man born blind does not remain blind, and we do not need to remain blind either. Jesus offers him the chance not only to see the light, but to be light. That promise is for us as well. We need only give up the illusions of our shadowed world.

We have a choice. The choice is not easy, but for the Christian there is only one option.

The true light that enlightens us has come into the world. He has come to us in our blindness and covered our sightless eyes with clay. If we go to the pool to wash, it is not only so that we can see the light, but so that we can be light in the world. The clarity...the keenness of sight, as well as the brightness of the image of God will shine through us because there will no longer be anything to disguise it.

May each of us continue on our journey through the wilderness of our discernment, of our exposure, of our enlightenment in the very example of Jesus...who lights the way for us to see more clearly our likeness in the very image of God who we praise in the revealed relationship of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.