

Do You Want to See?

Text: Luke 18:35-43

What happens when a person who has been blind since childhood suddenly is able to see? I read a modern account about just such a man who, in his early 40's, had an innovative operation to correct his blindness. When they removed the bandages from his eyes, he and his fiancée waited in eager anticipation – would he finally see light and colors and shapes, and best of all, the face of his loved one, his future wife? What a disappointed it was to them both when they found that, although he could see blobs of color and chunks of shapes, he could not really put them together. He did not understand what he saw, and he often misinterpreted what he watched happening around him. For example, it took him a long time to know that when the dog he saw lying on the floor changed places and positions, it was the same dog. He could not see or identify detail either. When asked about the statue of the gorilla at the zoo they were visiting, he said that it looked like his wife. When he was allowed to use his other senses of touch and smell, he quickly recognized that there was quite a difference between the two!

I had lunch last week with some scientists who were discussing how we see and don't see. Scientists have learned that the brain is exposed, moment by moment, to so many pixels of data that it has to pick and choose among them to make sense of what it sees. So we learn to see by giving things names, by putting things into categories. Think of how children learn to group all the different cows we show them into one group called "cows." Or dogs! Think of how many kinds of dogs we show children in our books. Big dogs, little dogs, white dogs, brown dogs, all sorts of breeds of dogs. "Dogs!" we say. "Woof, woof!" What a marvel it is that children learn so easily and quickly that they are all "woof-woofs!" or "Moo-cows!" Seeing is learned! Isn't that interesting? We don't just open our eyes and see. We are taught to see. But by seeing some things, we often don't see others. My scientist friends talked about how some discrepancies in their field of geology were often not talked about because nobody seemed to see them.

These observations help us to understand more clearly Jesus' teachings, for a major theme in the Gospels is about the importance of opening our eyes and seeing. But the first question is: do you and I want to see? The second question is: what do we want to see? And the final question is: how should we see? Are you ready for these questions? These are not easy questions. I hope that our exploration together of them today will serve as a starting point for further reflection during this Lenten season.

Do you and I want to see? To say that we want to see implies that we know that we are not seeing; it means that we are visually challenged: we are indeed blind. We don't like to acknowledge that, do we? Yet, as we confess every Sunday, the Holy Scriptures and our own experience teach us that indeed we humans are blind, blind to our failings, blind to the needs of others and the world, blind to the redeeming love of God. Do we want to see as badly as the blind beggar in today's reading, willing to cry out over the objections of the crowd, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Are we willing to answer, when he asks us what we want, "Lord, help me to see!"

When we ask for sight from Jesus, we are asking for seeing in a metaphorical sense, in the way the Bible so often uses it: to mean knowing and understanding. The people see, but do not understand, the prophets and Jesus proclaim. We are a people who, as the prophet Isaiah said long ago, "walk in darkness." We are not sure that we want to see the light, the light of God, because it is painful and harsh to our weak eyes. So God has decided to shield us from the full glare of God's complete luminous beauty by being born in a form that we can understand, an ordinary human form, a simple Judean carpenter man, full of wisdom, truth and light. This light has come into the world to un-blind us, to chase away the darkness, to give us true sight. Do we want to see? Will we follow the Light of the World? Or will we let ourselves get discouraged because it takes a while for our eyes to adjust to the light and to see more clearly? Will we give up because living in the Light, and seeing as Jesus sees, is too painful? Do we want to see?

Now the second question: What is it that we should learn to see? God has been trying to show us the answer that question for us since the beginning of human creation: we are to see what God is working in the world. We are to know that God is here, with us, ever creating ever redeeming. The Bible is full of stories of people who were in terrible situations causing them to despair until God answers, opens their eyes, and they see God at work, showing them a way out. That's the story of Hagar, sent to die with her son Ishmael in the desert who finally can see the saving well of water God provided. It's the story of the slaves in Pharaoh's Egypt who finally see a way out of slavery through an impassible sea led by God's emissary, Moses. It's the story of the exiles in Babylon, who see how to preserve their faith thanks to God's prophets, and finally find a way home their own country, thanks to God's work through Cyrus, king of Persia.

Jesus stresses the importance of seeing: "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it," he declares (Luke

10:23-24). His disciples were blessed, because they could see Christ himself! What are we to see? What all his disciples were seeing back then: we, today's disciples, are to see Jesus at work, now, in our lives, in the lives of others, in the world. We are being healed from blindness so that we can learn to see the Redeemer, the Savior, the One sent to give us the light of hope, the One who will lead us out of the darkness to the Source of Light, to God, because he is one with the Source. We can see him working in this world and join with him in his work.

So then, how are we to see? We, Christ's disciples, ask him: "Open our eyes and help us see, Teacher. Shape us to be like you and to see as you see, Master". Don't you ache to see as Jesus sees? What do you suppose Jesus sees when he looks out on the world? Can you close your eyes and imagine what the Savior might see as he gazes on the world? Jesus is calling us to look as he looks, to see as he sees, to understand as he understands.

The Gospels paint a very clear picture of how Jesus sees. Jesus is offered the power and riches of this world and he sees them through the eyes of truth, as temporary baubles and traps of temptation and rejects them. Do you want to see as Jesus sees? Then look for the truth in the rush to an overabundance of things. Seek first God's kingdom of love and justice, and these other things will follow. Instead of buying something you don't really need this week, stop and drop that amount in a piggy bank and then give it away to one of the many causes the church supports. Follow Christ Jesus and see through the eyes of truth.

Jesus sees the outcasts of society through the eyes of love, recognizes them as God's children and invites himself to eat with them. Do you want to see as Jesus sees? What group of people do you find yourself avoiding or disliking? Ask Christ to cure your blindness toward them, and reach out with a handshake, a welcome smile, until you too can sit and eat with them and call them sister and brother. Follow Christ Jesus and see through the eyes of love.

Jesus sees the sick and the paralyzed through the eyes of compassion, understands their suffering, and offers them healing. Do you want to see as Jesus sees? Then write a letter to a sick member. Or join in helping the rich world contribute medicines in a less expensive form to the poor world. Or advocate for more help for education and training. Follow Christ Jesus and see through the eyes of compassion.

Jesus sees injustice to the poor through the eyes of righteousness, and condemns those who do not minister to them. "When you give food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, when you visit the sick or those in prison, when you welcome the alien,

then you have ministered to me,” he says in Matthew’s Gospel. Do you want to see as Jesus sees? Then see Jesus in the face of the dirty, homeless man shuffling down the street. Then recognize Jesus in the prisoners, the convicted thieves and drug-dealers and illegal immigrants in our prisons. Then see Jesus in the face of those who cannot find work and those who are hungry. And when you see Jesus in these groups and individuals, you will look for ways to feed and clothe them; and you may also see the structures of injustice that need to be fixed that put the poor in jail longer than the rich. Do you see how difficult and challenging it is to learn to see, to see as Jesus sees?

Jesus even sees his executioners through the eyes of grace and forgives them! As he hung from the cross dying and in pain, arms spread in an embrace of love, he spoke words that echo down the centuries: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” Do you want to see like Jesus? Then forgive. And isn’t this the hardest thing of all! Do we really want to see through the light of forgiveness as we work with that bitter colleague, that annoying landlord, that ex-spouse or friend who said all those painful things? Forgiveness is not condoning the wrong, but it is letting it go of the situation and turning it over to God to deal with. It is perhaps the ultimate act of love. Follow Christ Jesus and see through the eyes of forgiveness.

Bono, the Irish rock star, was the speaker at the prayer breakfast in the Bush White House a few years ago. He made a statement to the president of the United States that really struck me. Churches, he said, have been quite effective. He gave an example: “When churches started demonstrating on debt, governments listened - and acted. When churches starting organizing, petitioning, and even lobbying...on AIDS and global health, governments listened - and acted.”

Churches have been effective in relieving the plight of the poor, advocating for justice, feeding the hungry, visiting the prisoner. Little by little we are learning to see as Jesus sees.

Do you want to see? Open your eyes and follow the Light of the World, Jesus Christ. Do you want to see as Jesus sees? Come learn from him to see with a heart overflowing with compassionate love. Then, as Isaiah tells us (58:10-11), “your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday and the Lord will continually guide you and satisfy your desire in scorched places.” Amen.