

...to Reveal God's Glory in Us—Fourth Sunday in Lent

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[1 Samuel 16:1-13](#)

[Ephesians 5:8-14](#)

[John 9:1-41](#)

In the Old Testament, a prophet's job is to tell God's truth, to help people see. And Samuel was a prophet. Samuel was tasked with telling the people that they were making ethical mistakes and religious mistakes and political mistakes. And he was given that task too of reminding the people, again and again, of God's promises despite these mistakes. As you might have guessed, being a prophet was dangerous.

So, at some point, God's people wanted a king. They called up Samuel and said: "Everyone else has a king! We want one too, we want to be like them."

Samuel said: "You don't want a king. They will tax you and oppress you, and take your children away to fill up their army."

But the people said: "Yes, we do."

And Samuel said: "Fine. God will decide who the king is." So, God first, in the story, picks Saul and sets up the King-making ritual. God says to Samuel, take a hollowed-out ram's horn, fill it with olive oil, and dump it on this guy Saul's head. Anoint him. Or in Hebrew Messiah him. In Greek, it's Christ him.

Saul, as you might have gathered, messed up. God's terms for the king were to follow all of God's rules to the tee. And Saul did not. So, God says to Samuel, "I will tell you who the new king is. Go to Bethlehem." Sam goes, and there we have our Hebrew Bible story today.

All of the strong sons of Jesse are rejected, until they come to the youngest, to David. And we have this wonderful truth, told to us in God's own words: "...the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

So, in our Gospel lesson from John, we also have images sight and blindness. And here is Jesus, this one whom both Matthew and Luke tell us was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. And John is showing, us, his readers, why Jesus is the Anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ. Jesus, being God, does not look at the outward appearance, but looks on the heart.

The prevailing wisdom at this time and long before, was that, someone who was born with a disability was being punished somehow. But since they were born with the ailment, they were being punished for someone else's ethical, religious or political mistake.

That's what the disciples say: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

But Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

And once this young man is given sight—this, in turn, makes everyone else blind! No one seems to know what's going on, or who the young man is anymore, neither the Pharisees nor all the onlookers, or even his parents. Their world is coming crashing down all around them. Their worldview can't really accept that Jesus is the Messiah, that Jesus is from God, or is God, even though in the story he is able to do these kinds of signs.

The Pharisees struggle here not because they are more evil or more stupid than us. Jesus being God would mean an unthinkable change in how they saw things, turning their roles and their authority upside down. And when people are met with big changes, big realities, they can't, or don't want to, deal with, they really often just shut their eyes and put their fingers in their ears.

So, what is the point? I will tell you that the point is: We, by ourselves, are blind. We are always the Pharisees in these stories. We think we know what we're talking about. We think we know all the ethical, religious, and political rules. We think we are in the right, most of the time. We think we see. But John is saying, when you introduce Jesus, when you introduce God, into the situation, then those who are thought to be blinded sinners receive real sight... and those who say they are sinless see-ers, are actually blind.

The instant you think you're better than someone else, more right, more righteous—look out. John writes, "Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.'"

How truly, truly humbling a thing is it to say: I don't see right. And I'm not talking about vision with your eyes. But 'Seeing' in the sense that St. Paul is talking about in the letter to the Ephesians: understanding, insight, discernment. How humbling is it to say: I am wrong more than I am right? What I think I know about different kinds of people—Black people, trans kids, people without homes, people who have served in the military, people who voted for Trump, people who are in prison—what we think about them is not really based on real sight, it's based on our own blindness, based on what the news tells us to see.

Jesus said to Pharisees, “If you were *blind*, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

We don't know anything. All we can really know is Jesus, and knowing Jesus we know God. And God does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. All we really can do is pray to God that we could see as God sees.

But we cannot. No one knows another's heart. We can certainly try to judge, judge one's hearts by their actions, judge a tree by its fruits, but we're not God. The disciples see the fruit of the man born blind from birth, and they assume, wrongly, he's a sinner. Jesus sees the man born blind and sees the reality that all people, all of creation, is an opportunity for God's works to be revealed.

And that's what Paul is talking about in the tiny little snippet from his letter today. Darkness here means invisibleness, unseeing—and light means sight. Paul is saying: you know that you did not understand reality before. You know that you all were metaphorical Pharisees, like Paul was literally. But take your understanding only from God, Paul says. Endeavor to see as God sees.

Jesus came, Paul says and John's Gospel says too, so that we would understand who we are and who God is. When Jesus talks about judgment, this is what he means: Jesus came so that we would realize, first, that, on our own, we cannot see as God does. And so that secondly, we would come to see a new sight, to be gifted a new understanding from Christ, an understanding that trusts that all people, all of creation, are all equally beloved by God, worthy of love, and capable of revealing God's glory.

Amen.