

Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year A  
Sam 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a  
Ps 23 *passim*  
Eph 5:8-14  
Jn 9:1-41

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In Year A of the 3-year Lectionary cycle we journey through the Gospel of Matthew. During the middle three Sundays of Lent, however, the Church pauses the regular programming (so to speak), to bring us three long and complex narratives, stories that are uniquely found in the Gospel of John.

Next Sunday we'll hear the story of how Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead, and we'll hear Jesus identify himself as "the resurrection and the life" [Jn 11:25].

Last week we had the woman at the well. Jesus offered her living water, remember, and she jumped at the chance, thinking that his gift would spare her the drudgery of going to the well every day and lugging the heavy buckets home. Jesus taught the woman (and us) that what he gives is so much more than labor-saving devices: he takes all of our searching, and he gives us happiness, true and genuine and everlasting happiness.

Today, on this middle Sunday, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, the three readings all reflect on seeing, on the sense of sight. From his letter to the Church at Ephesus, St. Paul tells us that we have passed from darkness into light, we have become light, and in the light everything becomes visible.

In the first reading, God has sent Samuel the prophet to the home town of Jesse, to discover the one whom God had chosen to be the next king of Israel. Jesse shows off his seven sons, each one a fine, strapping young man. And Samuel instantly knows whom *he* would choose, but his job is not to figure out *his* choice but to discern *God's* choice. God tells him to stop looking through his human eyes and to start seeing with the eyes of God. The youngest son, David, is out in the fields tending the sheep. Samuel knew to keep looking, and he recognized the right choice when he saw David.

Today's Gospel tells the story of how Jesus cured a man who was blind since birth and how that miracle got both the cured man and Jesus into trouble with the authorities. The man whom Jesus cured, despite the pressure he was under, clung to the simple truth: "I used to be blind. Now I see, and that's thanks to Jesus." In the end Jesus tells us that the harshest judgment is reserved for those who cling to their blindness and delude themselves into calling the darkness light.

In February this year, right before the onset of this coronavirus crisis, Peggy and I were on a cruise that took us through the Panama Canal. The Panama Canal has to rank among the most remarkable achievements of human engineering and technology. The project of

building the canal started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and went on until 1914. It suffered many setbacks and long delays because of the devastating effect of yellow fever and malaria. Many lives were sacrificed and years were lost because people with decision-making authority refused to believe that malaria and yellow fever were transmitted by mosquitos. Those decision-makers rejected the conclusive evidence of scientists and physicians and public-health experts because, as they saw it, it made no sense that a tiny thing like a mosquito could cause so much destruction.

With the benefit of hindsight, we blame those people for their obtuseness, for their refusal to accept the evidence that was before their eyes. We have to admit, though, that, in the moment, we all put a lot of trust in what we think we know from common sense. And sometimes we tie ourselves into knots by clinging to our delusions. Delusions are a coping mechanism: they are one way in which we try to deal with the stress and turmoil of daily life; they are a way of dealing with our fears and anxieties.

We all have blind spots, individually and collectively. Nobody should blame us for our blind spots, if – IF – we're willing to let go of our delusions when the truth stares us in the face. Sometimes we draw such comfort from our delusions that we are afraid of letting them go, we're afraid of unleashing the fears and anxieties, the stress and the turmoil that our delusions protect us from.

That's why this Gospel story of the man born blind is placed at the very center of our Lenten observance. We pray at each Mass, "Say only the word and my soul shall be healed." Jesus will heal our blindness, if we let him, if we get out of his way. Jesus offered the same healing power to the Pharisees who judged him as he gave to the man born blind. They closed their eyes to him. We have the same choice: do we humbly accept Jesus's healing power? or do we insist on going our own way?

Lent is the time-out period in the liturgical year; it's the time the Church gives us for changing our daily routine and doing something new and different in our spiritual life. For reasons nobody could have foreseen on Ash Wednesday, this year our Lenten time-out is a lot different from other years. Many, many of us have found that we no longer have to *go* to work or *go* to school. Maybe we still *have* work and we still *have* school, but we're not spending time in transit. We're not spending much time getting around.

Let me suggest a use for the extra time we get to spend at home. Let's take those three readings from the Gospel of John – the woman at the well from chapter 4, the man born blind from chapter 9, and the raising of Lazarus from chapter 11 – let's take them and read them, as a family. Let's savor them, and discuss them. Discover the meaning that is wrapped inside each one of them, the special meaning for you and your family.