

# FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

“I Was Blind but Now I See!”

John 9:13-17, 34-39

In the very earliest days of the Christian Church, the account of Jesus healing the man born blind that's contained in our Gospel lesson for today always received special emphasis whenever new members were added to the local congregation. Paintings on the plaster walls of the catacombs in Rome, where Christians often met during the persecutions of the first and second centuries A.D., tell us why, for they portray the healing of the man born blind as a symbol of Holy Baptism and baptism is, of course, the means by which many are made members of the church. Tertullian, a Christian pastor and teacher of those times, seemed to have this in mind when he wrote, “Happy is the sacrament of Baptism, in that, by washing away the sins of our blindness, we are set free to see eternal life.” Some scholars even believe that, since John wrote his Gospel in the late first century, that the practice of retelling this particular account was a part of baptismal celebrations already in his own lifetime.

For those early Christians as for John himself, this account had a much deeper significance than might first meet the eye (no pun intended). And, if we are to find that significance for ourselves this Fourth Sunday in Lent, we must go deeper too.

That deeper significance begins and ends with Jesus himself. Jesus never performed miracles just to perform miracles as if to show off his divine power. Rather, he always performed them in the midst of some great human need with the intent of leading the one who was the recipient of the miracle as well as those who were privileged to witness it to a deep and abiding faith in him as their personal Lord and Savior.

The account of the miracle that's contained in our text for today is a good example of that very point – for it speaks not just of one who leads one from physical blindness to physical sight but also of one who leads one from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight – not just of one who has come to open the eyes of the blind to physical light but of one who has come to open the eyes of the blind to spiritual light – not just as one who helps us see the light but of one who is himself the very light of the world.

And, you see, the early church looked at baptism in exactly that way. In baptism people were given the gift of sight – spiritual sight – as the Light of the World dawned in their dark lives. Indeed, they looked at baptism as the daily living out of their lives in that Light. The very fact that they were made Christians in their baptism and had remained so day to day was a miracle in itself, not unlike the miracle of the healing of the man born blind.

And their response was his response – the response of faith and worship. They knew for themselves that being an “enlightened” follower of Jesus Christ also meant persecution and hardship for the sake of that faith and worship. They knew that it was one thing to have Jesus

light up their life but it was quite another thing to live that life in that light day to day. And yet because they believed, they persisted in that light even unto death.

And isn't what was true for the early church also true for the church today? We too were born blind – once lost in the darkness of our sin and unbelief. But when the light of the world dawned in our lives through our baptism into Christ we were given the gift of sight – spiritual sight – too. And now we are called to live our lives in that light. That's the point Paul is making in today's epistle lesson. Living in that light, we are to have nothing more to do with, as he calls it, the "unfruitful works of darkness."

It's kind of like this. At the Fort Worth zoo there is a building where the tropical birds are kept. The hallway where visitors to the zoo walk is dark; but the birds are in lighted areas that resemble a tropical rain forest. There is a miniature waterfall, a pool, trees, and all sorts of plants. As visitors watch these birds for a while they become aware of the fact that there is nothing between them and the birds. They could literally reach in and touch them. And yet the birds don't fly away. How come? Well, a sign there explains that the birds love the light but hate the darkness and that they will do anything to stay in the light than go into the darkness.

In a way, that's a paradigm for the Christian life. We too are now living in the light of the Kingdom of God. We too are called to love the light and hate the darkness. We too need to stay in the light.

But how can we do that especially when the darkness is all around and looks so powerful and even, at times, so inviting? It's like what Luther said in his explanation to Baptism when he answered "what does Baptism mean for daily life?"-- "it means that our sinful self, with all its evil deeds and desires, should be drowned through daily repentance, and that day after day a new self should arise to live with God in righteousness and purity forever. For as St. Paul writes in Romans 6: 'We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.'"

May the account of the man born blind who was healed by Christ be for us what it was for the early church – the story of what Jesus did and continues to do for each and every one of us. And may God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.