

March 30, 2014

**Scripture Lessons ~**

Psalm 23

I Samuel 16:1-13

John 9:1-41

**Sermon**

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Jesus meets a man who was blind, and heals the man so he can now see. And you would think that everyone who saw that would rejoice, that anyone who saw that would immediately have faith in Jesus, and you would think that the man's problems were ended. But those that saw this extraordinary thing had questions, had lots of them. Hey, wait a minute Jesus – from which medical school did you graduate? Where is your AMA certification? – you are unlicensed, you are un-credentialed, uncertified. Who does he think he is?, forgiving the sins, without any theological training, restoring vision without any medical certificate, and I think that is one of the questions that John wants us to ask. Who is this? The healing in this story is done in a couple of verses. But the healing that ought to be the end of the man's problems was just the beginning of his problems because more verses, 39 verses are used in argument after the healing then the 2 verses it takes to restore his sight. Who is this? Who was blind but now sees? Who is this? Who brought sight to him? Well I don't know for sure, said the blind man, I was blind and now I can see. So they grab his parents, hey is this your son lady? Is this your kid, running around saying he has been healed, trying to make something big out of this Jesus? Well, says his mother, he sort of looks like our son, but we can't say for sure. Well we are going to kick him out of the synagogue. Dad says now that you mention it no that is not our son, we never saw that rabble rouser in our life before, and our son is blind. The man said, "You know the man who healed me, it was Jesus and will you now leave me alone?" And they kicked the once blind, now visionary out of church. Why would they do that? Because of the healing?, because they are religious leaders?

Because you know we talk about Jesus as the light of the world, and that is all fine and dandy as long as the light shines through acceptable channels, through the church, along with committees and organized, we say the light shines in the darkness, but you know light can be hard to control and contain. Think of your bedroom curtains on a bright morning and the sun shines in and refuses to be kept out. Light is powerful and uncontainable and insists on breaking in. And there is something about us, says John, something about us that loves the darkness more than the light. And so don't get too hung up on the how's and why's because after a few verses, it is not his story anymore, it is our story, about us, most of us who are not blind from birth, but blind to God's activity in the world. Are we open to God's initiative? Do we believe that God can transform us? Do we believe that God and Jesus Christ has the power to create new beginnings? Do we believe that Christ can heal us? And can forgive our sins? Do we believe that we need healing?

One of the churches I served in, in Massachusetts, had a number of 12 step groups that met in the church basement. And each week there were several meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, and Narcotics Anonymous, Eaters Anonymous, and many more 12 step groups.

One of our church members told me one day told me I go to worship services upstairs, and I go to group downstairs. Downstairs feels more like church. Upstairs everyone is nice and friendly. But that isn't enough, downstairs, downstairs is real. In our groups we know we need help to make it through the day. And we know we cannot be helped on our own, and that we know that we can be transformed and make a new start, and without our meetings downstairs I couldn't be a Christian. These are hard truths for those without addictions, to recognize the truth that every one of us needs help. The truth that people can be transformed, the truth that God can work outside the church, and outside of committees. We are like some of those Pharisees who didn't know that they needed Jesus, and that their concern of doing the right thing would blind them to God right there in their midst. They didn't know that new life was possible and they expected everything to be buttoned down, tidy, orderly, they were fortified against any surprises. I confess

that describes me too. Because I like everything to be buttoned down, tidy, orderly and I am not fond of surprises. Sometimes I am pretty pessimistic and I think no one is ever going to change? Things are never going to get better. And sometimes I think I am pretty sure, as to how God works, and what it means to be a Christian, how churches should function. Sometimes I am pretty sure I know how churches should function, and sometimes I am pretty sure I know who God loves, and when I am on a roll, I am pretty sure I know the best way to run the world. Sometimes I am just as blind as those Pharisees and blinder as that blind man. Sometimes I am so certain about what I know that there is no possibility for new insight. Sometimes I am so certain about what I can see I can't see something wonderful right in front of me. Sometimes I am so certain that no one will ever change, that I miss transformation taking place all around me. Sometimes I don't even recognize how limited my sight is, and how much I need the light of Christ. Jesus said "Because you think you see, you show that you are blind." We are not however without hope, because it wasn't in the story, the blind man's faith that healed him, it wasn't him crying out to Jesus, to heal me, forgive me – he was healed because Jesus came to him. Jesus came to the blind man, to the Pharisees and to the non-believers, and to the observant Jews and Jesus comes to us. If we are honest, we will admit we don't have it all together and we will acknowledge that we need help, that we don't see as clearly as we pretend to and if we are honest we will bring to the light our hurts, and brokenness, and our confusions. And when we admit we cannot see the path in front of us, then Jesus Christ the light of the world will grant us spiritual sight. Christ comes to us in so many ways, perhaps through a bible study, or prayers, perhaps through the touch of a friend, perhaps through a question from a stranger, or an incident half way around the world that resonates with us. In a time of struggle, or a time of great joy, we look and see life differently. We have new vision, we were blind but now we see, and I trust in that grace, that grace that comes to us. I trust that Jesus comes to me even when I am not looking for him, even when it comes in ways I don't expect. I trust that Jesus comes to each one of us, and offers us new life.

May our lives and our hearts be opened to this powerful and life changing love of Jesus Christ among us. Amen