

Sermon: Lent 4 (A)

St. Peter's, Norfolk

Text: John 9:1-41

Date: March 22, 2020

Among the e-mails that I have saved over the years in a file called "Keepers" is one entitled, **"Great Truths About Life That Little Children Have Learned."** Let me share a few of them with you.

This *Great Truth of Life* comes from an eight year-old boy. He says: **"No matter how hard you try...you cannot baptize a cat!"** This from a five year old girl: **"When your Mom is mad at your Dad....don't let her brush your hair."** Another *Great Truth of Life*: **"You can't trust your dog to watch your food for you."** Still another: **"Don't sneeze when somebody is cutting your hair."** And finally, **"You can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk."**

Now, I'm certain that these children learned these **"Great Truths"** and gained these new insights as a result of some eye-opening experience in their lives. Can't you just picture an eight year-old boy trying his darn-dest to fully immerse the family cat- in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? But that's the point- sometimes a dramatic eye-opening experience is what we need to give us new insight, a new perspective, or a new vision.

That's precisely what happened in our Gospel story today from John, chapter nine. A man, blind from birth, had a dramatic eye-opening experience with Jesus.....and talk about a new vision....talk about new insight....he was completely and totally healed. He came back from the Pool of Siloam with 20/20 vision.....able to see perfectly for the first time in his life! In fact, his transformation was complete and so dramatic that his appearance was a little bit different.

Some townspeople saw him and wondered, **"Hey, isn't that the blind beggar? He can see now. Is it him? Nah, it's just someone that looks like him- couldn't be him."** And the formerly blind man told them, **"It's me alright. I'm that same man."** The neighbors were amazed- they couldn't believe it. They asked him how it happened and he responded, **"The man they call Jesus healed me. He gave me my sight."**

And then there was great joy in the city....and they all lived happily ever after, right? Well, not quite. The Pharisees, the watchdogs of the religion, got wind of

what had happened and they came out fuming....upset about the whole affair because, for one thing, they were suspicious of anything Jesus did...and on top of that, it happened on the Sabbath Day- the day of rest, the day when no work was to be done. Healing was considered work, and so what Jesus did was a blatant violation of their rigid rules.

So they came out to investigate. They questioned the man's parents and then they interrogated the man himself- hardline questioning, the kind you see on a lot of police drama TV shows these days. And what was the man's response? ***"I don't know about all of that. I don't know about rules and regulations....I don't know if the man is who you say he is....but one thing I do know- I was blind, but now I see."***

The Pharisees were beaten and they knew it. So they did what people often do when they are made to feel insecure or lose face.....they turned to force. They kicked the man to the curb- they threw him out of the synagogue. They excommunicated him. When Jesus heard about it, he looked for the man. Aware of his trouble, Jesus came to help.

That's Good News, isn't it? When we are in trouble, Jesus comes to help. And when they did meet face to face, Jesus said to him, ***"Do you believe in me?"*** And the healed man answered, ***"Yes, Lord, I believe."*** And then he worshiped Jesus.

It's a great story, isn't it? There is so much here- blindness and sight, sickness and healing, prejudice and love, fear and faith, rejection and acceptance, defeat and victory. It's so packed with the stuff of life.

I had a classmate in Seminary named Joe. Joe is from Mobile, Alabama. In summing up what happened to the man born blind who could now see, Joe would say (in his best Southern drawl) that the man had been ***"Jesus-ed"***..... his eyes had been ***"Jesus-ed"***. And as a result, he could now see the world in a new way. He could see it as Jesus sees it.

All of which leads me to the question- Have you been ***"Jesus-ed"***? Have your eyes been ***"Jesus-ed"***? Have your eyes been anointed with the Spirit of Christ? Can you see the world as Jesus sees it?

"Well", you might be thinking, "I don't know. I've never really given it much thought. And anyway, how would I know if I've been "Jesus-ed"?"

Well, I believe there are three ways (three indicators of change, I'll call them) that will help you to know whether or not you (and your eyes) have been **"Jesus-ed."**

(1) **The first is how you see yourself.** You know, in a very real sense, we all are born blind. We are all born blinded by what might be called the cataracts of self-centeredness. Now don't get me wrong, I love babies. They are wonderful. They are truly among God's greatest miracles. But babies see every person as someone who exists solely for their benefit and comfort. That's just the way they are. They come into the world screaming- **"Do something for me- feed me, love me, hold me, change me, rock me"**- in that order, in the reverse order, in any order they like and anytime they want as long as it is right now!

And that can continue through infancy and childhood and (if nothing happens to change them) into the teen years....and sometimes, sadly, even into adulthood for some. It's **"Me, me, me...take care of me, cater to me, please me, pamper me."** We all know adult people who think that the world revolves around them.

But time and time again (in the Gospels) Jesus makes it very clear that one of the things that blinds us most is this self-centeredness. And the only cure is to have our eyes **"Jesus-ed."** Part of what being **"converted"** means is to move from a *self-serving* vision to a *serving others* vision- to move from **"What have you done for me lately?"** to **"What can I do for you, now."**

Have your eyes been **"Jesus-ed?"** Can you see beyond your own selfish desires? Can you see yourself- not as one to be pampered and coddled, but as one committed to be one of God's servants in this world? How do you see yourself?

(2) **A second indicator is the way you see other people.** A mom took her children to a crowded restaurant after church one day. Her six-year old son asked if he could say grace before the meal. He prayed, **"God is great and God is good, let us thank Him for our food; and God, I would thank you even more if Mom gets us ice cream for dessert, with liberty and justice for all. Amen."** After he finished, there was a great deal of laughter from the nearby customers. But a woman sitting at the next table grumbled, **"That's what wrong with this country."**

Kids don't even know how to pray. The very idea- asking God for ice cream! Why I never!"

The little boy heard the woman- and burst into tears. He asked his mother, ***"Did I do it wrong, Mommy? I'm sorry. Is God mad at me?"*** She pulled him onto her lap, hugged him tightly, and assured him that he had done a terrific job with his prayer and that God was certainly not mad at him. Just then, an elderly gentleman walked over to the table. He winked at the little boy and said, ***"I know God really well. I talk to Him every day and I happen to know that God loved your prayer. In fact, it may have been the best prayer He's heard all day!"***

"Really?" the little boy asked. ***"Cross my heart,"*** said the man. Then he leaned over and whispered into the little boy's ear. And pointing to the woman who made the remark, he said, ***"Too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes."***

Well, naturally, the mom ordered ice cream for her kids at the end of the meal. The boy stared at his for a moment and then he did something that no one in that restaurant that day will ever forget. He picked up his ice cream and, without a word, walked over and placed it in front of the woman at the next table. With a big smile, he said to her, ***"Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes and my soul is good already."*** The people in the restaurant applauded and you've got to believe that somewhere in Heaven, Jesus was smiling because that little six year-old boy had already learned how to look at others with the eyes of sacrificial love.

Seeing (truly seeing) is always a matter of the heart. When our eyes have been ***"Jesus-ed"***, we see with our hearts. We see people differently. We accept them and embrace them and help them and treat them with respect and love. Have your eyes been ***"Jesus-ed"***?

When our eyes have been ***"Jesus-ed"***, it changes the way we see ourselves, it changes the way we see others and third and finally.....

(3) **It changes the way we see God.** Going back to our Gospel story, notice the way the healed man refers to Jesus. Notice the growth. There is a magnificent progression as he sees more and more clearly. At first, he refers to Jesus as ***"a man."*** When asked how he came to be able to see, he responded, ***"The man they***

call Jesus did this for me.” Later, as he’s asked by the Pharisees about who he believes Jesus to be, he answers, *“To be able to do what he’s done, he must be a prophet.”* Then at that intimate moment at the end of the story, he sees clearly that Jesus is *“the Son of God”*, and he proclaims Jesus as *“the Lord of His Life.”*

Do you see what’s happened? The closer he got to Jesus...the more time he spent with Jesus...the clearer he saw God. And my friends, that’s the way it works for us, too. That’s what it means to have your eyes *“Jesus-ed.”*

So let me ask you again, have your eyes been *“Jesus-ed”*? Can you see beyond yourself and your own wants and desires and needs and reach out to others. Do you see yourself as a servant? Or as one to be served?

And how do you see others? Do you see them as objects of God’s love? Do you see each person as someone for whom Christ died? Do you respect the worth and dignity of every human being- even those folks with whom you disagree or with whom you don’t care to hang out?

And how do you see God? Do you know Him? Do you know Jesus? Are you spending time with Him? Are you in touch with His Holy Spirit and how He is working in your life- day by day? Do you trust his Lordship over your life? Do you see him at work, even in the midst of the danger and anxiety that exists in our lives right now?

If not, you can be *“Jesus-ed”*. All you need do is ask. This season of Lent is the perfect time to do that. Today is a good time to do it.

Or maybe you need to be *“re-Jesus-ed”* (that’s my word, not Joe’s). Perhaps you’ve backslid a bit (fear and anxiety can cause us to do that) and are not seeing things as clearly as you once had- because you’ve been spending less and less time with Jesus and are becoming more and more self-focused. You can put a stop to that now-today.

Just ask God to re-anoint your eyes- so you can see things as He sees them. He’ll do it. He wants to do it. He wants you to see! Amen.