

Fourth Lent, 2011

St. John's, Roanoke..... The Rev. G. Thomas Mustard

The airport was extremely busy. People were scurrying to and fro. The passengers on one particular flight had been sitting at the gate waiting for the pilot to show up so they could get underway.

The pilot and copilot finally appeared in the rear of the plane and began walking up to the cockpit through the center aisle. Both appeared to be blind; the pilot was using a white cane, bumping into passengers on the right and left as he stumbled down the aisle. The copilot was being led by a guide dog. Both had on sunglasses.

At first, the passengers did not react, thinking it was some sort of practical joke. After a few minutes though, the engines started to reeve, and the airplane began moving toward the runway. The passengers looked at each other with some uneasiness. Some began whispering to those seated next to them and some looked desperately to the cabin attendants for reassurance.

Yet, the plane started accelerating rapidly, and people began panicking. Some passengers were praying, and as the plane got closer and closer to the end of the runway, the voices became more and more hysterical. When the plane had less than fifty feet of runway left, there was a sudden change in the pitch of the shouts as everyone screamed at once. At the very last possible moment, the plane lifted off and was airborne.

Up in the cockpit, the copilot breathed a sigh of relief and said to the pilot, "You know, one of these days the passengers aren't going to scream, and we won't know when to take off!"

You have noticed, I'm certain, that it is only those who can see who tell jokes about those who cannot. If these opening moments attempting to catch your attention in a humorous way have offended, I apologize sincerely.

One of the overriding themes of John's Gospel is light versus darkness. John uses words and stories to help his readers understand the deeper theological realities of the relationship God in Christ wants to have with both creation and creature. Today's story begins with the band of disciples walking with the teacher along a well-traveled road. John says, "Jesus saw a man blind from birth." People had been noticing this man for years, as he sat with his tin cup, receiving their change when they felt particularly generous. The disciples "noticed" the blind man; Jesus "saw" him. There is a world of difference between simply noticing and genuinely seeing.

Those who noticed the blind man represent that group of people who believed their good works made them children of God. The blind man, whose sight is restored by the healing touch of Jesus, represent that group of people who understand they cannot remove their own cataracts, physical or spiritual, and who welcome the healing poultice.

We, too, must decide which of those two ways to look at the Gospel of Jesus the Christ is the proper one. The choice we make goes a long way in determining the way we live our lives as Christian people. If we cannot restore our own sight, then I would gently suggest we present ourselves, body, mind, and spirit at the foot of the throne of grace.

So, what happens when a person is touched by this one who says, "Be made whole?" First, I would want to say that one becomes a delivered person. Delivered from the burden of thinking our sins have caused our disease, delivered from thinking we are bad people who need to be good, instead of accepting ourselves as sick persons in need of healing, and delivered from allowing others to establish our wellbeing. Jesus said to the blind man, "Your sins are forgiven. Go and be made whole." Among the many things that means is, accept God's forgiveness, stop beating on yourself, stop allowing other people to set your life agenda, and stop playing the killing game of "if only." Go and live as you are intended to live, as God created you to live, whole in mind, body, and spirit.

Secondly, I would want to say that being touched by Jesus the Christ means one becomes a selected person. The man born blind becomes, with the healing touch of Jesus, an instrument to manifest God's glory. Our striving toward wholeness may also be an instrument God uses to show others that God is a loving God who desires wholeness for the creature and creation. Identifying those things in our lives that disintegrate, that force us into a life of increased stressful living or makes us see our lives in neat compartments is the first step toward healing. Allowing the earth to have its soul back again is the first step in moving ourselves out of the center of the universe and will address issues like "global warming" in a way that nothing else can. Simply saying, "God, I can't handle this. You can, so I'm turning it over to you," places us in the healing stream. It is one of the great deceptions of life, from both the right and the left, to say that we can handle it ourselves.

Thirdly, and last, I would want to say that being touched by Jesus the Christ helps us realize we are a protected person. We may literally rest in the loving arms of Almighty God. What a silly faith statement that is.

A blinding mud-plaster made of spit and clay, laid on eyes that could not see, along with clear instructions about what to do next, placed that blindness in the healing stream. “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” and you will see. Go, wash in a pool of blood at the foot of Calvary and you, too, will see. You will see that you once walked in darkness and have now become a protected person, bathed in God’s healing light.

Being a delivered, selected, and protected person always leads to an invitation. The formerly blind beggar is asked if he believes in the Son of Man. “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” “You have (now) seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” And faith-eyes, now corrected to 20/20, see with spectacular clarity and say, “Lord, I believe.” The formerly blind beggar worships him and is so changed, such a new person, that his old friends, who noticed but never saw, can’t even recognize him. What a marvelous story!

I have often thought that one of the things we should do when we come forward to the rail is hold a mirror up as we receive the bread and wine. We would see a delivered, selected, and protected person who has been invited into a new life and a new way of living that life. Cataracts would fall away and we would join with the formerly blind beggar and say, “Lord, I believe.” At the very least, we would know we were now flying. Amen.