

It's been another wild week, hasn't it? What we think is now the new reality today is overturned and obsolete tomorrow; 50 people can gather, no, 10 can gather, no, no one can gather. I myself cannot keep up with the swift changes that we are told by governmental bodies, and ecclesiastical bodies day by day by day. And it all gets more and more challenging....and in truth, frightening.

What remains steadfast through all these changes is our God in whom we live and move and have our being. God does not see as we see. We are by nature people who judge the day by the weather, the newspaper we read (virtually), or the TV, radio or podcasts we listen to. The weather looks fine. The streets are dry and look safe. But things are not what they seem by looking at the sky. What we know, as Christians, is that God looks not on the appearances of things, and on the words of people. God looks on our hearts.

So, our first reading today from the First Book of Samuel makes us realize that what **we** see is not God's view. God knows that Saul is a bad king. The people may not be able to see that. But God is intent on ushering in a new era of a new king. That new King is to be David. And the Prophet Samuel is the conduit for making what God wants to happen a reality. Even if Samuel doesn't understand God's ways, he obeys God's commands and puts his own views aside. That's what we must do now. We have to put aside our own personal needs and look on our dire situation as God would. That is not easy when we have never been in a place like this before.

We have another long story from the Gospel of John this morning. I'm glad you're all sitting down for it because if you were in church, this would be one of those times when I would invite all of you to have a seat at the reading of the Gospel...even though it's our usual tradition to stand for the Holy Word.

This story is of a miraculous healing. A man who couldn't see for his whole life, had mud put on his eyes by a holy and caring man, and then suddenly he could see. Our thoughts naturally turn to our time and our crisis and wonder if God will perform a miracle and make this pandemic disappear.

What is important about this man who was blind from birth, and his relationship with the man he called "Rabbi", is that he was transformed by his relationship with Jesus. He himself says to several who ask, "He put mud on my eyes and then I could see." He did not offer some sort of theological explanation for what had happened to him. He did not question the validity of the experience. He just retold the reality of the life-changing event.

He was not to blame for his situation. He did not blame anyone else for his blindness. He just simply told the story of what things were like, what happened, and what he is like now. That will sound familiar to some of us who have been through a lot in our lives.

This man went from a person who could not see a thing, to one who could see much more clearly than the people around him. "Lord, I believe," he tells Jesus. If we too are believers in Jesus then in what ways has Jesus opened our eyes and given us new sight? Can we now see more than just our own discomfort about having to stay at home? Can we now see that we are engaged in a wartime effort of a new sort?

One of my sons works for a company that has now repurposed itself. They are now designing and manufacturing face masks for doctors and nurses as fast as they can; a new vision and new sight to see what God wants of us.

I'm sure many people in our country are doing things such as these and are transforming their jobs and their lives. It is as eye opening for us today as the mud was on the eyes of the unnamed blind man in the story told by John. Some little thing strikes us and wakes us up from our anxiety and worries of the situation we are in, and allows us to refocus on God's reality, God's hopes for us, God's desire that we live and love each other.

And remember...it is still Lent. The Gospel story of the blind man today, and the ones for the last couple of weeks: the story of the woman at the well, and the story of Nicodemus are stories of the power of Jesus to transform the world-view of individuals. Lent this year for all of us turns out to also be about our having to change our behavior, and change how we view disease. We all have to take responsibility for keeping other people safe.

Does anyone remember now what we chose to do for a Lenten discipline this year? Did you decide to give up something for lent, or take something on as a new holy habit? Does it even matter anymore?

Yes, I think it does matter. Even if we are so distracted by the daily onslaught of news and tragedy and panic, it is still Lent. It is still time to focus outside of ourselves and our worries and focus on God's transforming invitation to each of us as we prepare for maybe the most important Easter of our lives.

No, we are not going to be in church together on Sunday, April 12. But this Easter will be one of truly turning our faces from death to life. God will show us how. And how do we prepare for Easter? By practicing a holy Lent. Isaiah has told us how to continue our Lenten disciplines;

⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. (Isaiah 58:6-8)

No, we probably cannot bring the homeless poor into our homes right now in the midst of this pandemic, but the principle is the same. Isaiah calls us back to remembering our priorities of God, family and community; to help each other in whatever new creative way we can, to feed and clothe those who suffer, to remember those who have no income today, and those who are sick, and those who are lonely. Maybe this is the time ...exactly the right time ...to take on a new Lenten challenge. How many of your friends,, neighbors, family members might you call or write to today? What will God's transforming power lead us to do and to **be** today?

Let us pray:

God of peace and God of love, keep us today from fear and anxiety. Help us to focus our hearts and minds on your call to us to be a non-anxious presence to all whom we see and meet and speak with today. Amen.