

On this fourth Sunday of Lent our new testament reading is a long passage from John's gospel.

Jesus, making his way toward Jerusalem, takes time to heal a blind man.

His actions create controversy and consternation for the witnesses and the religious leaders.

Listen to this story, not as an ancient tale, but as words of instruction sent to us today so that we might gain insight into our own lives. Hear now a reading from the gospel of John 9:1-41.

**Here ends the** reading of God's holy word. May He add to our hearing and understanding, his blessings. Amen.

Please pray with me.

Discerner of hearts, you look beneath our outward appearance and see your image in each of us.

Banish in us the blindness that prevents us from recognizing truth,

so we may see the world through your eyes and with the compassion of Jesus Christ who redeems us.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Amen.

## **Sermon**

I spent a fair amount of time in the past week in airports making our way to and from San Diego.

Aside from being overwhelmed with the number of people who move through the air travel industry in a given day, I was intrigued by the diversity of humanity.

It seemed that God's creative masterpiece was on display – every shape and size, color, nationality, personality – of course, only those who can afford to travel.

In the beautiful Oceanside parks of southern California, however, I also saw those who live outside with only as much as they

can carry.

I believe that I saw more people in the last ten days than in the entire previous year.

I wondered about their stories.

In Chicago's O'Hare airport I saw a man wearing a t-shirt that said 'Bad choices make great stories.'

In our daily lives we all make choices (consciously or subconsciously) about what we will see and what we won't.

It's tempting to choose not to see the suffering and injustice in our world – to switch off the news, and to ignore reports of grief, war and trauma.

It's tempting to avoid seeing certain people and to allow them to just blend in with the landscape, removing their need and struggle from our vision.

It's tempting to avoid seeing God's truth and grace in those with whom we disagree, and whom we would rather see as "all

bad”.

It’s tempting to avoid seeing the brokenness in those we support and with whom we agree and to see them as “all good”.

It’s tempting to avoid seeing the resources, the opportunities and the capacity we have for making a difference, and to rather believe we can do nothing.

But, as one writer proclaimed, “if we have really seen Jesus, and if we have truly seen God’s reign proclaimed and manifest in Christ, then we have to confront how we see things, and allow God’s grace and mercy, God’s truth and justice to change our seeing and shed light on our world, our relationships and our neighborhoods.”

What do you see when you look at the world?

Are you looking through your mortal eyes or can you imagine God’s vision?

From the Hebrew scripture we are reminded: “the Lord does not

see as mortals see, but looks on the heart.”

How do you see other people?

In the reading from 1 Samuel, Samuel looks upon David and sees  
a small shepherd boy, but God sees a king.

In our gospel reading, Jesus sees a man born blind and he is  
moved by compassion to give the man sight.

The disciples see a sinner and they jump to judgment.

The neighbors see a beggar, or perhaps have stopped seeing the  
man at all.

The Pharisees see a threat and spring into defensive mode.

The man sees himself as the recipient of an unimaginable gift –  
both sight and faith.

Which vision resonates with you?

Who are you in this story?

This exercise is not meant to judge but to help us understand that  
our own limited vision might be precluding us from seeing

God's grace and glory all around us.

When we look on another person with anything less than Christ-like compassion we are robbing ourselves of the opportunity to experience grace.

I heard a fascinating report on the radio this week about a group called 'Ceasefire.'

Led by Dr. Gary Slutkin, a professor of public health at the University of Illinois – Chicago, this group advocates changing the way we view gun violence – embracing a public health model to see violence as a contagious disease.

Dr. Slutkin argues "The root cause of cholera is cholera," "The root cause of violence is violence." He says there's a reason why some neighborhoods are plagued by gun violence.

"The definition of contagious is it produces more of itself, and how much you've been exposed is the predictor of whether you're likely to do it," he says. "So this is a health problem."

*Ceasefire* has been interrupting the cycle of violence with measurable success.

Many of their advocates, who call themselves 'violence interrupters' are former gang members who were helped to transform their lives by re-envisioning their relationships.

They were trained to sort out disagreements and refrain from retaliatory violence.

These young people were transformed by the opportunity to see things from a different perspective.

This is the message Jesus is trying to convey in today's gospel.

By using the extraordinary process of making mud and putting it on the man's eyes, he engages the man in his own healing.

The blind man must allow Jesus to do something unusual- allow a stranger to put mud made of spittle in his eyes.

Next he must participate by going to the prescribed river and washing.

Finally, he must witness to others what he has experienced.

A story of compassion; of trust; of transformation; of grace;

A story of faith.

This is our story.

Jesus looks upon you with compassion and recognizes what you  
need.

Jesus offers you healing and transformation – but you must  
accept ---you must do your part.

What is it in you that cries out for God's healing touch?

What are you willing to do to transform your life?

How often do you witness to your faith?

My friends, in this season of Lent we are called to look deeply at  
our relationship with God.

We are challenged to identify the broken places in our lives and to  
place them in God's hands.

Transformation is always preceded by trust.

You will not see changes in your life until you believe that they are possible.

God's power is so great – unimaginable to our limited human brains.

Scripture gives us metaphors for describing God, but they all fall short: gardener, shepherd, light, water, bread...each only hinting at the enormity of God.

Our stories are no different than the stories of all those people in the Chicago airport...they are no different than the shepherd boy chosen to be king.

They can, however, be transformed, made holy, by allowing God into our lives.

I read something this week that said, 'if you want to be a person of faith – just pretend that you are.'

Live your life trusting that the God who breathed life into you, creating you from the dust of the earth, wants the best for

you.

All you have to do is trust.

Have faith. Have hope. Spread love. Be at peace.

Amen.

Gracious and loving God, we turn to you this day seeking your  
presence in our lives.

We call you to this place, in this moment of time, to help us live up  
to our God-given potential.

Grant us the grace, we pray, to be models of compassion in our  
world.

We yearn to live out your vision for us – lead us to still waters and  
green pastures.

Protect us, guide us, restore our souls.

We turn to you now with prayers for those whom we love.

For those who are sick, we pray for healing.

For those who mourn, we pray for comfort.

For our neighbors whose stories are unheard, for those who are  
lost and wandering, for those we do not see; we pray that  
your love might transform their lives as well as our own.

We pray for those who lead us – that they may have the wisdom  
of David and the heart of Christ as they endeavor to bring  
peace to the world.

We turn to you now in the sacred silence of this Meetinghouse  
with the prayers of our hearts....

Amen.