

#### **4 Lent A**

1 Samuel 16:1-13  
Psalm 23  
Ephesians 5:8-14  
John 9:1-41

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Rite of Healing

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Grace peace to you from Jesus who loves us.

I know I often say, "this is one of my favourite stories from the Bible," but this story of the blind man being healed truly is one of my favorites! It's just so human, with all of its characters and their colorfulness. It's a great example of the complexity of human life and relationships and even families. I love how it accurately portrays just how stubborn, ridiculous, stuck we can be at times - and yet Jesus continues to reach out and work with us and love us. And, it's funny!

The big question of the day was around the concern of who was sinful. It was a common thought in ancient Israel that blindness (like any other ailment) was caused by sin. It's quite reasonable then that the disciples would ask Jesus, when they came across this blind man, who was at fault. And the answer Jesus gives is very simple: none of the usually suspected parties is to blame. And yes, Jesus will heal this blind man, but also he will reveal just how far-reaching blindness can be.

We start with physical blindness. Jesus uses a simple mixture of spit, mud, and instruction and this man's sight is restored. The direct and simple nature of Jesus' interaction with the man is evidence of God's desire for abundant life for all. There's nothing complicated about it. No list of requirements, no entry fee. The man is so moved by what happens that his world is changed and he begins a new path of discipleship and faith. Jesus had not only cured his sight, but by doing so changed his world.

Now if we stop here this is a miraculous story of love and compassion as we hope and expect from Jesus. But, if the story stops here, then we would only be spectators to the good news. John wants to go further and make it very clear that blindness is far more prevalent than we'd imagined. So, the story doesn't stop there, it is only paused, as the other characters in the story get caught up in the peripheral aspects of the healing.

Firstly, Jesus did this on a Sabbath. Work (and yes healing counted as working) on the Sabbath was strictly forbidden. And if Jesus wanted to prove he was a man of God, he surely wouldn't break the Sabbath Law now, would he?

Besides that, everyone is looking to point the finger of blame somewhere: Jesus, parents, the man himself. To all of them something seemed off – curing sight doesn't just "happen." Like an email speaking of a long lost uncle from whom you are about to inherit billions... a simple healing was too good to be true. It all fits in with the big question of sin. If this man could suddenly see, then that would mean his sin was gone – and who could do that, but God alone?

All of this so unbelievable to them, even for his parents, that this three-ring circus of debate makes its rounds as they examine every possible angle, seeking to discredit either the miracle itself, the man and his family, or Jesus.

No one cared the man was blind before, and no one cared about him after he was healed, which leads us to part 2 of this story of blindness.

Every single person in this story (except Christ) is blind. The structure of society provided the framework, the religious leaders provided convenient excuse, the parents were too afraid to get caught up in the blame. These types of blindness (when we see through law, tradition, power or fear) are far more devastating than physical blindness; they undermine the core of what makes us human. John is inviting us to pause and pray about our own blindness, rather than be simply being thankful we can see. Think about that for a moment, in what ways are you blind?

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In what ways do you have trouble seeing or letting go or changing? Are you too comfortable and avoidant of change? These are important and faith-filled questions, because blindness means we have stopped following Jesus. It means we've become reliant on our own direction, will, interests and values. As we become blind our world gets smaller instead of expanding toward the largeness of God.

In the church blindness takes different shapes too. It might be traditions that limit our acceptance of others or that leave a legacy of hierarchy that is harmful. It could be a building that once provided a sense of pride and gathering, that later becomes a liability. Blindness may sound like a longing "*for things to be like they used to be,*" which prevents us from stepping into the future or even into today. Blind people in church don't see one another anymore, don't know each other's names or life stories.

Our blindness also extends to families, workplaces to the ways we live with Creation. It is far reaching and often we have no idea it's even there.

We pray: Come Jesus, Light of the world, and make your medicine of salvia and dirt, spread it over our eyes and bodies, spread it thickly over our laws and

peoples, cover our dining room tables, let this balm ooze into every crevasse of humanity – bring healing.

Do we dare to upset our ways and dismantle our power and expectations in favor of God's? Can we fathom the possibility of letting go of control and trusting in Jesus who loves us? Might we explore what Christ could do among us should we be healed – our eyes, minds and hearts?

God's invitation is always before you. Today you are welcome to come forward for the rite of healing. God knows what blinds you, where you hurt, what you grieve. And God knows even what you do not. Come and let prayer surround you. And know when you leave today, that God goes with you into all that is in your life or in what is missing.

Amen.