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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

Sunday, March 19, 2023

4 Lent, Year A, Revised Common Lectionary

[1 Samuel 16:1-13](#)

[Ephesians 5:8-14](#)

[John 9:1-41](#)

[Psalm 23](#)

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If you go to the city of Jaffa in Israel, right next to Tel Aviv, you can visit a number of biblical sites connected with the Prophet Jonah and the Apostle Peter. You can also visit a very distinctive restaurant called Blackout. It's completely staffed by visually impaired waiters. And the entire space is kept completely in pitch darkness so that guests have their dining experience without the sense of sight. It's one of fourteen "dark restaurants" worldwide, part of a movement that started about twenty years ago. The restaurant is part of a cultural center that promotes connections between Deaf and Blind people and hearing and sighted people. And people who eat there have all kinds of responses. Some say it's the most incredible meal they've ever had as they embrace using their other senses in their fullness: the tastes and textures of foods, temperatures, flavors, the sounds of glassware and silverware clinking, even maybe the freedom to abandon usual table manners with no one able to see you and eat with your hands. Others find it anxiety-provoking to be in the dark, to have to be guided to a table, to have the food described to them and not be able to see it, to have the sense they depend on for security stripped away.

It's also an experience of role reversal as the sighted people are very much at a disadvantage, while those who are blind are the experts, are at home in the dark.

“God does not see as mortals see,” we heard from the prophet Samuel today.

So many of us rely on physical sight to make our way through the world. So much so that the language of seeing and light is a huge part of the metaphors we use for things like knowledge. “I don’t see what you’re saying.” “I saw the light.” “It dawned on me.” But today in our gospel reading it’s the blind man who has wisdom unavailable to those around him who can see.

Even after Jesus opens his eyes, this blind man has the capacity to rest in the darkness; in the mystery; in the not-knowing. When they ask him where Jesus is, he says, “I do not know.” When they ask him who Jesus is, he is content not to have all the answers. He leans on his own experience: “he must be a prophet, because he opened my eyes and now I see.” Later when he speaks with Jesus again, he’s again content not to have all the answers: “Who is the Son of Man, that I may believe in him?” And Jesus tells him, and he worships.

I want to invite you to close your eyes for a moment. Close them, and sit in silence for a full minute. I’ll keep track for us. Close your eyes, and notice what it is to sit in this space, what you hear, what you smell, what you feel, what your body becomes aware of.

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What was it like to sit in the darkness? What might we notice when we take away our accustomed ways of knowing?

The religious leaders think they know the answers. They are well established. They know the proper ways of behaving and believing. They are not accustomed to darkness as the blind man is. They have not had the practice in not knowing, in asking for help, in resting in the wisdom which is mystery. And so they miss the great salvation that is in front of them. They do not know God's power at work when they see it. They see, but they do not have understanding. They see with their eyes, but they flounder without a guide. The blind man knows how to be guided, and in doing so he finds wisdom.

This Lenten season our scriptures are guiding us toward wisdom. They are baptismal readings, ancient ones used to prepare people to come to the saving waters of new life in Jesus at Easter. They guide us to find what we seek in Jesus who is living water for our thirst, light in our darkness, new life in our death.

May we follow these scriptures to the one they are leading us to, and may he be our living guide along paths seen and unseen.