

Homily  
March 19, 2023  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent (Laetare Sunday)  
26:22 – 38:56

Are you enjoying Spring? (Laughter) Not a day in February that I remember did it get to 18 degrees. It is this morning. (Gestures, “What!?!”) God has a sense of humor. I would like to give that sense of humor a cold shoulder.

There are three threads that tie our readings together so well today:

**Blindness**

**The Unexpected**

**And Persistence.**

Blindness, the Unexpected and Persistence.

In our Second Reading from Ephesians, Paul tells the Ephesians, “You were Darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord.” Not you were IN Darkness and now you are IN the Light. But no. YOU were Darkness and now YOU are Light in the Lord. The Lord is the source. And that source of Light has pierced the Darkness. And they have become believers.

Think back to Paul himself. How he was blind – multiple times. The first was his blindness to the truth of Jesus Christ. So much so that his anger and fury, as we hear in his writings and in the Acts of the Apostles, he was bent on destroying the believers.

And then on the road to Damascus, he has a *theophany* of the Lord Jesus, himself. “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” He’s bathed in Light and becomes physically blinded. Scales form over his eyes. He’s led on to Damascus and there Ananias, after a conversation, lays hands on him and the scales fall away. Not only is his physical sight cured, the blindness set aside, but the journey of sighted faith begins. He is no longer blind to this Christ and he spends the next years of his life keeping before him what he now sees.

Of all people, Paul was the unexpected bearer of the Good News. One, as he himself says, “born out of the normal course.” But that’s the way of God, isn’t it?

Samuel was a very important judge in the time of King Saul. He had anointed Saul. Saul proved to be a very unreliable king. And so the Lord sent him to Bethlehem, to Jesse's household to find a new king, someone to anoint. That's our reading today. What precedes it is Samuel using the ruse to go to Bethlehem to offer sacrifice and share in a sacrificial meal with Jesse's family.

He's looking. He's trying to do what the Lord has asked. He's trying to see who this chosen one is. But as the reading says, how God sees is not the way man sees.

So in a sense, Samuel is temporarily blinded by good looks, stature. And he goes through six brothers and none of them are the right one. As we heard, he asks *well, you got another son somewhere?* And there was one – the youngest. Obviously, since he was the youngest, he wasn't that important to be there for the sacrificial banquet. But rather, he was out tending the sheep. You know – get him out of town. Push him aside.

He is called. And the Lord says, "Look! Anoint him." The youngest. The one not invited. The unexpected. And Samuel now sees as God sees.

The man born blind is the central focal character of the Gospel passage today, Chapter 9 of John. Born blind. Caused by sin? Jesus says, "No." But the man is a beggar Jesus reaches out to. We know he creates mud out of his own saliva and smears it on his eyes. (Don't tell your ophthalmologist you're going to do that, okay?) And he sends him to the pool of Siloam, which means "sent," for him to wash his eyes.

Keep in mind the word sent, as we go forward, here. He sees! And he comes back. And then he encounters a barrage of interrogation and doubt. "Oh, it can't be him. No. It's just someone who looks like him..." "Well, how did this happen?" He is interrogated. He tells them. They don't listen.

They are blinded by their religious righteousness and by the fact that Jesus happened to do this on a Sabbath. He did a good thing on the Sabbath. And they were blinded by not seeing the wonder and the gift that this man has been given.

His createdness in his sight has been restored. You would think they would be joy-filled. No. They're blind. Even as the man born blind can now see.

Thus, my brothers and sisters, the very unexpected - someone in their time who would have been the last person they would have thought would be sent, with a message of healing, is the one. To the point where - as he goes through all of these interrogations – he gets stronger and stronger in his

conviction, his faith. To the point where when Jesus proclaims himself the Light, he worships. He has come to be spiritually sighted.

I've always wondered what happened next. Have you ever thought about the man born blind? What did he do next? He's now proclaimed the Son of Man and worshiped. We don't know. But I have a *feeling* – he became a disciple.

Now, that's the **Blindness** and that's the **Unexpected**. - **Persistence**.

Once one can SEE in these readings – whether it's Samuel – whether it's Paul – or whether it's the blind beggar – they persist in going forward.

They persist in proclaiming the Word. Paul, for the rest of his life.

They persist in looking to understand how God sees. Samuel

They persist through the difficulty of being interrogated and coming to understand that through this crucible, if you will, they now have the faith of sight. The man born blind.

Some of us here are blind. Physically. Legally blind. You don't have to raise your hands. But we can fix that, can't we? For the most part. Put on a pair of glasses or contacts and you can see a whole lot better.

But spiritually blind...

You know we all have our blind spots, don't we? Our blind spots in faith. Our blind spots about life. We have challenges that face us constantly. We don't know what to do. And we feel like we're in darkness.

We are also unexpected. Each one of us in our own way. We are an unexpected messenger. An unexpected one, driven to faith in the gift God gave us. The question is, are we willing to make the journey persistently to see as God sees. To see as the wise ones who are in our midst or have gone before us teach us. To open the eyes of our hearts and minds. To grasp God's presence and his assurance that we will see, that we will understand, that we can grow in faith and persist in it, even when it starts to fade and we persist anyway.

Look at your blindness this week. Gaze upon the wonder that God has chosen you – unexpected as you are -- and persist in it this week -- that look, that gaze -- that you might grow in faith, in spiritual insight towards Easter joy.