

Lent 4 March 22, 2020 Psalm 36, John 9 Believing is Seeing

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We know the saying – *Seeing is believing*.  
But now here’s Jesus saying we’ve got it backwards.  
It’s actually – *Believing is Seeing*.

Which I believe. But it still doesn’t always sound quite right to me. We’ve known too many cases of someone telling us to just believe in him and everything will be fine. Then it isn’t.

So I was wondering earlier in the week whether to continue in our lectionary gospel reading schedule in John’s gospel where we’ve been the past two weeks (and are scheduled to be for awhile)... Or try to find a more comforting scripture for these uncomfortable times...

But the phrase *Believing is seeing* stuck with me, and wouldn’t go away... And I mentioned at the dinner table one night... I was thinking about *Believing is Seeing* as perhaps the sermon theme... And our daughter Rohi immediately pointed to me and said, “daddy look at your shirt!”

As is often the case, she saw quickly what I had missed... And how could I forget? Here I was, wearing my favorite black hoodie, given by Reah’s sisters – that says in big letters across the front – *Faith, not Seeing, is Believing* – and in smaller letters – the biblical reference from Hebrews 11, verse 1.

So taking Rohi’s reminder as a sign – and since we are talking about a sign today in John’s gospel – and since in John’s gospel what we usually call miracles are instead always called *signs* – and since Jesus does seem to be talking about our human habit of being blind to what’s plain to see... (Even when, in my case, I’ve got the words of scripture written on the sweatshirt that I’m wearing...)

I figured – best to just stick with our assigned scripture for this Sunday... So I’ve been hunkering down in place with Jesus.. Asking him to help me open my eyes, ears, heart and mind to him and be attentive. Asking him to help me and all of us together – to see our life situation with the eyes, ears, heart and mind of Jesus... Our Teacher, who we’re here to learn from... As he teaches us to be life-long learners...

And speaking for myself, I know I have a lot to keep learning... As, like probably most of us on the planet, I’ve been struggling this week... to find all the spiritual balance I possibly can and hold on tight ... in these tumultuous times...

A time or season when even the most basic decisions seem to require adjusting routines and expectations... And almost everything – except losing my

cool – takes longer than usual...

So now I'm hearing this story of a man born blind who now can see – which bible scholars point out is a prime example of John the gospel writer's sense of humor – is also, as the book of Esther says in another context – a story sent from God – *for just such a time as this...*

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Like the conversations we've been part of over the past two weeks, today we're again in a story about talking with Jesus and learning to see him for who he is. And much like last week with Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well – which seems like months ago now to me – now again today, as we watch the man born blind's vision gradually begin to emerge... then continue to come into focus... it feels a bit like watching a caterpillar slowly struggling to emerge from its chrysalis cocoon and become a butterfly... A bit like watching a young person be born, start to grow up...and come of age – speeded up a thousand times faster so it all appears to happen in less than ten minutes...

As through a series of conversations, first with Jesus – then with neighbors – then with hostile religious authorities – then in a conversation between authorities and his parents – then the man and the authorities again – then back to him and Jesus – then, just when conversation seems to be over – one last dialogue between Jesus and the religious authorities. And when this last conversations goes silent... we're left to see...

A man blind from birth... who now sees with 20-20 vision...

And those who think they see... are...

Now seen to be blind...

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We've been talking over the past two weeks about Jesus' unique use of language in John's gospel – where his words are seldom meant to be heard overly literally. So I believe its safe to say – the seeing Jesus is talking about today's got nothing to do with eyesight. And everything to do with believing.

Believing in him. Which can be a work-out. Because believing, for Jesus, means following him. And he can be a bit of work to follow at times. Even though we know... He is the way the truth and the life. The giver of life... life abundant... life eternal... Still –

It can be easy to get bogged down in the blues... when life imitates the words of the old Ray Charles cover of the Percy Mayfield song *Danger Zone* – *Every morning noon and night... finds me hoping everything 's alright... You know the world is in uproar... Danger zone is everywhere... (Everywhere...)*

The world was in an uproar when that song was released in 1962 and I was starting Junior High School... And I still remember the fears that came with growing up with cold war shadows of nuclear Armageddon looming...

But I also remember – God brought us through all those dangerous times... and many other dangerous times long before...

And God is able always... to bring us through anything that happens...

Still, when my anxiety runs higher I often catch myself forgetting to do some of the many things I know I ought to do.... to cope and chill out...

Like breathing... deeply... slowly... and

Counting my blessings... and

Saying ‘I love you’... to God, to my family... friends... and all our parish...

I know it’s wrong and a waste of time... to forget the basics of faith...

I know whenever I forget the basics of the gospel, I’m inevitably going to end up having to see myself as one of the more unfortunate characters in today’s episode.

I’m embarrassed when I catch myself acting like the disciples today – asking whose fault is this blindness? The man? Or his parents?

Jesus of course says it wasn’t because of the sin of the man or his parents. (We know elsewhere in John, Jesus says ‘don’t sin again, lest something worse happen to you’ (John 5) and ‘go and sin no more’ (John 8). But those conversations aren’t about how someone was born. And they’re just between Jesus and the person involved. Not a public trial – like what the religious hierarchy is doing with the man born blind.

Still, I confess, like the Pharisees, I too sometimes forget the basics – and blame some poor soul for the mess they’re in... Till someone – most often my wife and daughter, reminds me – we’re all sinners... And helps me connect with this man properly – as a parable for all of us – born spiritually deaf, blind and ego-centered... The basic human condition... That we’re supposed to grow out of with the help of God and one another...

Some grow out of some of the symptoms faster than others...but the power to become children of God Jesus offers as taught by St John... has nothing to do with power or ability to achieve what the world sees as important. The gospel isn’t about *Seeing is believing*...As if believing is an accomplishment on our part. It’s about *Believing is seeing*... It’s about receiving the grace of God as God’s gift...

So... I’m practicing thanking God for all the simple gifts that come to us with faith

by grace... Faith and grace that work through love.

I'm thanking God for our daughter who reminds me to read the words of scripture written on the sweatshirt I'm wearing. Then plays music from a Vacation Bible School at our sister church, Swift Memorial in Sagamore – and the songs are about *Jesus is the light of the world* – (the phrase we've heard in our first reading today) – and *This Little Light of mine I'm gonna let it shine...* And – *I Have Decided to Follow Jesus...* All excellent responses to today's gospel...

And I'm still learning... to follow Jesus... watching our daughter... as she reminds me to practice – and practice some more... what I preach and try to teach...  
And slow down. Slow down... and Listen...  
Listen... more carefully...

And I'm thanking God for all of you who remind me... to  
Look up – look around – see the beauty of God's creation...  
Look and wonder – Pause and listen – See and hear...  
All the blessings that are not and cannot and never will be cancelled...  
Remembering now again...  
All the help with believing I have been receiving... this week...  
As Joe labors to rebuild our web page for online worship... As Vicki and Linda help keep all our communication flowing... As Don and Drew keep our buildings in good shape... As our finance teams ask our help to keep us operating... close as possible to normal... till we can meet again face-to-face... As Arne and Nathan bring me a laptop to record this sermon... As Joyce and Susan and Tom update our road signs... And Tatsiana plays for us beautifully (online now) helping us know we're still the church... As we all continue to share with each other... prayers and words of hope and encouragement...

And seeing now without even using our eyes...  
We can feel the prayers... of all the people...  
Praying as with one heart...  
For the healing of all our communities...  
The healing of all our nation...  
The healing of all the families on earth..  
The healing of all God's world...

Let this be our prayer always....  
And remember always to say...  
Thanks be to God. Amen.