

Third Sunday in Lent
March 19, 2017
St. John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39
The Light of the World Dispels Human Darkness
Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Perspective matters. Consider three different views of the Grand Canyon. The atheist artist offers, "Mother nature has painted a beautiful landscape." The WELS pastor said when I saw it in 1979, "What a glorious display of our God's handiwork." The cowboy contemplates, "What a terrible place to lose a cow." People view disabilities from such varied viewpoints.

Take blindness, for example. Some look at blindness not as a disability at all, but as part of life that no should look on as limiting. Those at the other end of the spectrum believe blindness is a terrible cross to bear. John's record of Jesus giving sight to a blind man leads us to a third possibility. "This happened so the work of God might be displayed in him."

Pay close attention with me to this miracle as **The Light of the World Dispels Human Darkness**. The radiant power of Jesus' love makes the blind see. The radiant power of God's Word makes the blind believe.

Jesus and his disciples came upon a man "blind from birth." He was begging. This in itself shows the sad state of love among the God's people since they were supposed to take care of such people. The disciples voiced a false belief some hold today, that God punishes sin with physical disability and suffering. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Jesus would have none of the disciples false belief. He quickly and lovingly corrected them. "'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in him.'" Far from being a coincidence, this meeting would accomplish God's purpose. The wheels had gone into motion with the birth of a boy born blind. Now God's Son would make the man the blessed recipient of the miracle that gave him his physical sight.

Here we have one of our Savior's great "I am" statements. "I am the light of the world." With his power as the Creator, Jesus dispelled the man's blindness. The radiant power of Jesus' love makes the blind see. The Old Testament had promised this work of the Messiah. It would not be an end in itself but would witness to his divine person and work. That same power and love are what put Jesus on his cross and enabled him to be the all sufficient sacrifice who has released us from the power and punishment of our sin and guilt.

How true the words of the psalm writer in Psalm 103, verse 2, 3, "Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases." It is no less a miracle of God's power and love when he heals our illnesses. It is a miracle when through the instruments of medical people and medicine, God fixes us. I think about a young WELS helicopter pilot badly burned and injured in a crash recently who is doing well and out of most of his braces and tubes. The blind still regain their sight as doctors remove cataracts. Or, we retain our sight as the doctor prevents glaucoma and other eye diseases from robbing us of our sight.

Jesus' miracle caused quite a stir among the Pharisees. Some condemned Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. How sad their lack of love more concerned about the outward keeping of a day than the fact that a blind man now could see! Others argued Jesus could not be a sinner or he would not have any power to do what he did. "So they were divided."

There is so much more here, isn't there? The beggar recognized Jesus as a prophet. The light of the world dispels human darkness in another way; he dispels the darkness of unbelief.

There is great similarity here with Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well we heard in last Sunday's gospel. Both needed enlightenment to dispel the darkness so they could see Jesus as their Savior. Both had been spiritually blind since birth as we all are. The light of the world dispels their darkness through the power of his Word. Jesus told the sighted beggar as he told the Samaritan woman that the one they now were looking at is the Savior God's prophets had promised. The man could see with his eyes the Jesus who had given him his physical sight. He also saw through the eyes of faith that this same Jesus is his Savior from sin. "Then the man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped him." Worshiped literally means to bow the knee before God.

We thank God for shining the radiant power of God's Word into our hearts to dispel the darkness of unbelief. Now we see Jesus not only as the one who heals our diseases but as the one who has healed us from our sin. We call Jesus, Lord. We bow the knee before him because we see with the eyes of faith that Jesus is God.

We call on his name and he answers us. Jesus went to his cross to heal us from that terrible and fatal disability that cripples our love for him and for each other. On the cross we behold the greatest miracle God did. He redeemed us lost and condemned creatures so that we would be his own.

Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." What does our Savior mean by that? He means it is my judgment, my determination, that those who recognize their spiritual blindness will see through the light of Christ, and those who think they see, like the Pharisees, by trusting in themselves, will be blind to the truth about who Jesus is.

Perception matters when looking at Jesus. Those who look on him as unnecessary are as blind as the atheist artist who wrongly thinks Mother Nature created the Grand Canyon. Those who look upon Jesus as the light of the world have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit. We see our salvation as the display of the work of God.

Don't fail to see the Father's display of his radiant love and power in Christ for our lives. They save us. As we heard in our second lesson, they give us ability to live as the children of light who "have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness but expose them." We also view crosses and suffering not as things that happen to punish us, or happen at random. We view them as opportunities for God to display his work in our lives.

Most of all we view our saving faith in Christ as the way God displays his work in our lives. Without his gracious touch upon our spiritual blindness we would still not see. Now we see and the sight is glorious. Now we see the Son of Man and echo the beggar's words and action, "Lord, I believe, and he worshiped him." Amen. <SDG>