

BIBLE STUDY
March 16, 2020

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

1 Samuel 16: 1b, 6-7, 10-13a

John 9: 1-41

Ephesians 5: 8-14

1. 1 Samuel 16: 1b, 6-7, 10-13a

- During Lent, the first reading from the Old Testament is chosen to give us a review of “salvation history.” During this Cycle A, the Lenten first readings are (1) Adam and Eve, (2) the call of Abram, (3) Israel in the wilderness, (4) the anointing of David and (5) Prophet Ezekiel: I will open your graves and have you rise from them/I will put my spirit in you that you may live. God entered into history, into our lives in order to work out our salvation. God is a participant in human affairs. He is present and active in our lives by concrete historical events.
- King Saul lost God’s approval. God rejected him and looked to anoint a new king. The Lord told Samuel to go to Jesse of Bethlehem. One of his sons will become the new king.
- The first born son received all the rights and privileges of the family. It would be presumed that Eliab, the oldest, would be God’s selection for king. He even looked like a king. But, God does not judge by appearance but by looking into the heart.
- Samuel went through all seven sons and God rejected them all. There was an eighth son who was tending the flocks. Samuel waited for him to arrive. The Lord chose him and Samuel anointed him king. He was now “the Lord’s anointed.”

2. John 9: 1-41

- Background notes: Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. This was a thanksgiving feast that celebrated the harvest. Men slept outside in booths made from branches which commemorated the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years. On the first night of the feast, the temple was illuminated with torches and as it was up on a hill was called, “the light of the world.”
- The Pool of Siloam was a major source of fresh water for the city of Jerusalem. During the Feast of Tabernacles, which included prayers for rain for the crops, water was carried daily from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple where it was poured on the altar of sacrifice.
- Water and light figured prominently in the feast. Jesus refers to water and light frequently in chapters 7-9. The Tabernacles feast was a joyous feast and so it came to be believed that the Messiah would appear during this feast day. That is why these chapters contain much speculation about whether Jesus is the Messiah or not.
- The story is a drama about the recovery of sight by a blind man. The story is not only a story of physical sight but a story of gaining spiritual sight.

We witness the process of illumination of the man born blind through which he comes to the faith in Jesus. "The man called Jesus">>>"Prophet">>>"He is from God">>>"Son of Man">>>"Lord"

- At the same time we witness the descent of the religious leaders from sight into the darkness of sin by denial, false accusation, and bullying.
- The story begins with Jesus' denial that physical ailments are a result of sin. No one sinned that he was born blind. He was blind so that the works of God might be made visible in him. When God brings us through trials and tribulations, then we have a testimony of how God saved us.
- Jesus' making of clay reminds us of the story of creation when Adam is made from the clay of the earth. This is a story of re-creation for the man born blind.
- Jesus tells him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. Siloam means "sent." The man born blind is sent by Jesus to the pool. The washing gives him sight just as baptism gives us spiritual illumination.
- There is a discussion among the people about the man born blind and how he sees. He was a beggar and familiar to the people, yet some say he is not the same person and others say he is. People see different things. They see what they want to see. They deny what they see.
- The man born blind does not mince words. As people argue about whether it is he or not, he simply and emphatically says, "I am he." He will become bolder as the discussions get heated. He seems to grow in faith as he is forced to defend the reality of his cure.
- The people bring the case to the Pharisees, presumably because it had to do with a violation of the Sabbath laws. The man born blind simply repeats what he knows to be true and what happened to him. "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see." The Pharisees claim that Jesus is not from God because he does not obey the Sabbath. The man born blind says, "He is a prophet." His faith is growing. The light increases in his soul.
- The Pharisees deny reality. They deny that he was blind even though there are many witnesses who knew him when he was blind. They call in his parents who testify that he was born blind. However, they are so scared that they want nothing to do with it and refer the Pharisees back to their son because he is of age. The Pharisees must resort to bullying and intimidation.
- The Pharisees call the man born blind again and bully him into denying what happened to him. He remains firm: "I was blind and now I see." He becomes emboldened and sarcastically asks the Pharisees if they are asking him because they too want to become disciples. The man born blind answers very logically: he opened my eyes which only God could do, so, how could he not be from God? He is expelled from the temple.
- Jesus goes searching for the man born blind. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who will leave the 99 and go in search of the one lost sheep. He finds him and asks him if he believes in the Son of Man? Son of Man means Jesus as Judge. The man asks who that is. Jesus answers, you have seen

him=if you see the Jesus in the flesh then you have seen the Son of Man, the Judge who is to come. Judgement is believing in Jesus as Son of God. Jesus comes to make people play their hand and show their true colors. Are they blind but come to see because they believe? Or do they see (they believed in the God of Israel) but become blind because they cannot believe in Jesus as Son of God?

- The man answers with a profession of faith by bowing to the ground and calling Jesus, Lord. Lord signified belief in Jesus as Son of God. He worships him. Only God is worshipped.
- Jesus ends with a final condemnation of the Pharisees for their blindness. It is ironic the man born blind can see but they who see are blind to who Jesus is.
- "What ultimately emerges, then, is a sense that faith, far from being a flight into unreality and make-believe, actually entails a heightened capacity to see and accept the truth: the truth about oneself (including a sober recognition of one's own proneness to self-deception and selfishness), the truth about the world, and the truth about God's outreach to the world in the person of the Son to draw human beings out of selfishness and delusion to the freedom of divine eternal life." Brendan Byrne, *Life Abounding*, p. 169.

3. Ephesians 5: 8-14

- The Letter to the Ephesians is different from Paul's other letters in that it is applicable not only to Ephesus but to all the churches. It has universal tone. Paul is speaking to all the baptized who are faithful to Christ.
- He uses imagery of light and darkness which symbolizes day/night, good/evil, knowledge/ignorance, divine/demonic. It reminds us of creation when God created the light as day and the darkness was night. It echoes the Gospel reading of Jesus, the Light of the World, who illumines with the truth those who believe in him.
- We were once in the darkness of sin but through faith in Jesus at baptism we are now light in the Lord. To live as children of the light means to walk in the light, i.e. live our lives in the light. We got to learn or grow in the light. Discover what the Lord asks of us.
- We also need to reject the darkness and its shameful ways. We let our light shine so that we scatter the darkness. We expose it for what it is.
- The passage concludes with what might be a traditional baptismal hymn that was probably well known.