

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
4th Sunday of Lent
2023—A Cycle



I ONCE WAS BLIND, BUT NOW I SEE

What do I see?

How does this rendering of Jesus healing the man born blind by [Gioacchino Assereto](#) (ca. 1640) speak to me about the blind man? About Jesus? About my own “blind spots”?

Opening Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

God of Light and Vision

Be with me as I open the word of Scripture
and share my life with you.
Healer of the man born blind,
grant me the gift of sight to see you clearly
in those who are physically
and/or spiritually sight-impaired.
Let me serve as a hopeful, healing presence,
in my own family... and in my world,
as you are for me each and every day.
And keep me always in your love.
Amen

Original source unknown

Scripture Readings

I Samuel 16: 6-7, 10-13 “The Lord said to Samuel, ‘Fill your horn with oil and be on your way... for I have chosen my king.’”

Psalms 23: 1-6 “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.”

Ephesians 5: 8-14 “You were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”

John 9: 1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38 “Jesus disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this blind man or his parents?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither.’”

Introduction to the 4th Sunday of Lent

In the play and film, “The Miracle Worker,” based on [William Gibson’s](#) book, we find the true story of a young [Helen Keller](#), blind and deaf due to an illness during infancy. Frustrated by her inability to communicate the thoughts and feelings raging within her, Helen displayed violent, self-destructive behaviors. As a last resort before committing their unmanageable daughter to an institution, Helen’s parents hired a young woman named [Annie Sullivan](#) to “teach” her. “The rest,” as we like to say, “is history.”

In this weekend’s gospel reading from John 9, Jesus encounters a man blind from birth. In those “dark ages” of medical science, people considered such conditions as a revelation of either the parents’ sinfulness or the offspring themselves. Spoiler alert... Jesus heals the poor man, allowing him to see (physically) for the first time.

The underlying message in this incident is that we are all “visually impaired,” but we display our handicap in different ways. We might have sight... but do we really “see”? We might have ears, but do we listen? We may have all our limbs... but do we use them for the good we can do with them?

Today, we live in an era of divisive, polarized societies, and even a divided Christianity. Each person or group claims that only *their* version of the truth is gospel. This week’s Scriptures call us to examine ourselves in the not-so-flattering, shattered mirror of personal, religious, and social intolerance. But *how*?

In his homily of May 2, 2015, Pope Francis called upon all Christians to stand with Jesus on the margins of society:

“This is the mission of the Church: the Church that heals, that cares [for people]. I sometimes describe the Church as a *field hospital*. True, there are many wounded, how many wounded! This is the mission of the Church: to heal the wounded hearts, to open doors, to free [people], to say that God is good, God forgives all, that God is our Father, God is tender, that God is always waiting for us....”

Sadly, too many who call themselves Christians consider the Pope’s vision of God and Church as *not-so-holy ground*.

A Reading from the First Book of Samuel (16: 6-7, 10-13)

“When he arrived [at the home of Jesse], Samuel noticed Eliab and said to himself, ‘Surely, here before the Lord stands his chosen king!’

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Don’t be impressed by his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. God does not view things the way men do. People look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’

“Jesse presented seven of his sons to Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, ‘The Lord has not chosen any of these.’ Then Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Is that all of the young men?’

“Jesse replied, ‘There is still the youngest one, but he’s taking care of the flock.’

“Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Send and get him, for we cannot turn our attention to other things until he comes here.’

“So Jesse had him brought in. Now he was ruddy, with attractive eyes and a handsome appearance. The Lord said, ‘Go and anoint him. This is the one!’

“So Samuel took the horn full of olive oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers. The Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day onward.”

Personal Reflection

This event is unusual. Israel already had a king, Saul, who was still alive! But Yahweh had given up on Saul for his descent into a life of evil. So, David—already anointed king—had to act as if he served Saul, which he did... faithfully and heroically.

Yahweh reminds Samuel the Prophet that humans tend to see only with their eyes rather than their hearts. In adolescence, David—the runt of Jesse’s litter—showed no evidence of the moral qualities, intelligence, and courage he would later display as a military chief, politician, and king. Only Yahweh knew David’s potential.

In any human group, we need to discern the values of each person and not allow appearances to deceive us. Christian communities need people with the ability “to look into the heart” of others, both the quiet ones and those who show much zeal. Eventually, they will find the persons needed to animate the community and separate out the self-serving ones.

David was the “runt” of Jesse’s litter. In some families, a child gets labeled as “our difficult child,” or “this one won’t amount to much.”

— *Whom do I know who has turned out to be someone truly special, despite being written off by parents, friends, teachers, or authority figures?*

— *When have I made a negative judgment about someone based on appearances only and later discovered that I had misjudged that person’s deeper gifts and true heart?*

— *If I was the “runt” of my family litter, how has that affected my life? How has God shown favor to me and proved my discounters wrong?*

Responsorial: Psalm 23 (1-6)

God, shepherd and host: a Davidic psalm of confidence.

*If today you hear his voice,
harden not your hearts.*

The Lord is my shepherd,
I lack nothing.
He takes me to lush pastures,
he leads me to refreshing water.
*If today you hear his voice,
harden not your hearts.*

He restores my strength.
He leads me down the right paths
for the sake of his reputation.
*If today you hear his voice,
harden not your hearts.*

Even when I must walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no danger, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff reassure me.
You prepare a feast before me
in plain sight of my enemies.
*If today you hear his voice,
harden not your hearts.*

You refresh my head with oil;
my cup is completely full.
Surely your goodness and faithfulness
will pursue me all my days,
and I will live in the Lord's house
for the rest of my life.
*If today you hear his voice,
harden not your hearts.*

Personal Reflection

Psalm 23, thought to have its origin in David himself, must be by far the best known and most beloved of all the 150 psalms. We hear nothing of our sinfulness, no recriminations or warnings to bring our lifestyles into conformity with the laws of the God of Israel—and later Jesus. In this one short psalm, the entire focus centers around Yahweh inviting us to rest in the loving and protective arms of our all forgiving Creator. The only distant cautionary refrain is in the response, “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” *If today we hear... how can we respond with “hardened hearts”?*

As Christian believers, we sing to our comforting shepherd. We know the price Jesus paid to fill our cups to overflowing. And yet he invites us to... “Drink! This is my blood that has and shall be shed for you.” And yet there are days... yes we have our days... and times when we refuse to go to that well of love that we will read and reflect on in this liturgy's gospel (the woman at the well).

— *What is my favorite verse of Psalm 23? Why that one in particular?*

A Reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians (5: 8-14)

“You were at one time darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light—for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For the things they do in secret are shameful even to mention. But all things being exposed by the light are made evident. For everything made evident is light, and for this reason it says:

“Awake, O sleeper!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you!”

Personal Reflection

In Ephesians 5: 8-14 Paul reminds the community of the radical transformation they've undergone and the subsequent radical transformation that new life demands.

Writing online in [Working Preacher](#), commentator [Amy L.B. Peeler](#) quotes TV host [Stephen Colbert](#): "In an interview with [Bart Ehrman](#), a New Testament scholar who expressed doubts about Jesus' divinity, [Colbert] asked, 'What is the son of a duck?' The answer being, of course, a duck."

Paul drew a similarly obvious and familial connection. If the Ephesian Christians lived "in the Lord," they merited their calling as children of God and children of light. Light... the very nature of their identity. Light determined how they walked in the world. In other words, how they lived, what they thought, felt, said, and did. Paul spoke from his own experience of physical blindness and spiritual darkness (Acts 9: 8, "Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus").

"You were at one time darkness, but now you are light in the Lord."

— *How do I personally identify with St. Paul's statement about darkness and light?*

— *We all have our dark stories (the "skeletons" in our closets). Where would I be now—really—if God had judged me in the darkest moments of my life... and given up on me?*

The Gospel According to John (9: 1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38)

"Now as Jesus was passing by, he saw a man who had been blind from birth.

"Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud with the saliva. He smeared the mud on the blind man's eyes and said to him, 'Go wash in the pool of Siloam' (which is translated 'sent'). So the blind man went away and washed... and came back seeing.

"Then the neighbors and the people who had seen him previously as a beggar began saying, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?'

"Some people said, 'This is the man!' while others said, 'No, but he looks like him.'

"The man himself kept insisting, 'I am the one!'

"They brought the man who used to be blind to the Pharisees. The day on which Jesus made the mud and caused him to see was a Sabbath. So the Pharisees asked him again how he had gained his sight. He replied, 'He put mud on my eyes and I washed, and now I am able to see.'

"Then some of the Pharisees began to say, 'This man is not from God, because he does not observe the Sabbath.'

"But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such miraculous signs?'

"Thus there was a division among them. So again they asked the man who used to be blind, 'What do you say about him, since he caused you to see?'

"He is a prophet,' the man replied.

"To which they replied, 'You were born completely in sinfulness, and yet you presume to teach us?' So they threw him out.

"Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, so he found the man and said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'

"The man replied, 'And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?'

“Jesus told him, ‘You have seen him; he is the one speaking with you.’

“The man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him.”

Personal Reflection

The key to today’s gospel became clear when Jesus told his critics *there is no sin in physical blindness*.

Real blindness occurs when we think we know everything—about everyone. There’s no fault in not seeing or understanding many things. Trouble comes when we refuse to open our eyes to the newness of life that God offers us every day.

No one in the Bible who drew close to God... or to Jesus... with humble sincerity, ever went back to their daily life saying, “Oh yeah, no big deal... same old, same old.” The Samaritan woman (last week) and the man born blind went away *renewed*. They saw everything through new eyes. Their daily lives would never be the same again.

We can expect a similar result, if we let Christ be the sight and light of our life.

Like Yahweh’s choice of David in today’s first reading, Jesus picked the ‘runt of the litter’—a despised man, blind from birth—and offered him not Israel’s “kingly crown,” but the double gifts of physical sight and faith sight.

— *What is Jesus saying to me about how I should treat marginalized people—immigrants, the homeless, those differently abled, addicts, people within the LGBTQ+ communities? And what about the people who wait on me at the coffee shop, and those who pack my grocery bags, and those who don’t speak English well and work hard for low wages to support their families?*

Miracles are God’s surprise gifts. They come in all sizes and shapes.

— *If I had to pick one incident in my life and label it “miraculous,” what would it be?*

Jesus often seeks out the least likely people for his friendship and concern—the “runts of the human litter.” Last week, the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. Today, a man shunned by society.

— *In what way(s) am I one of those “runts” whom Jesus loves?*

For Inspirational Listening and Watching

Watch

“[Why the Blind Man Saw](#)” produced by [Jesus.net](#) (8 min.)

Listen

“[Amazing Grace](#)” sung by [Celtic Woman](#)

“*Was blind but now I see...*”

Journaling Prompts

Based on this weekend’s Scripture readings, what does Jesus ask me to do TODAY regarding...

(1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships...

and

(2) my life as an emissary of Christ, committed to bringing God’s love to the people

with whom I interact in person and on social media?

*Who needs to receive from me this week a moment of laughter and personal concern?
Why do I hesitate?*

In light of this weekend's Scriptures, take some time to write about events occurring in your life this week and what you see happening in the world.

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

5th Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37: 12-14 "I will open your graves and have you rise from them."

Psalms 130: 1-8 "I trust in the Lord; my soul trusts in his word."

Romans 8: 8-11 "If Christ is in you, the spirit is alive."

John 11: 1-45 "Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!'"

Closing Prayer

This week, let me listen to Jesus' teaching on *spiritual blindness*, as found in the Gospel of St. Matthew:

"You are light for the whole world. A city built on top of a hill cannot be hidden, and no one would light a lamp and put it under a clay pot. A lamp is placed on a lamp stand, where it can give light to everyone in the house" (Matthew 5: 15).

Lord, you say to me, *"Make your light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and praise your Father in heaven"* (5: 16).

In these words I hear you call me to be light to those around me.

Lord, you tell me, *"Your eyes are like a window for your body. When there is light within you, you have all the light you need"* (6: 23).

Lord, let me be a light for those around me.

Lord, you remind me, *"God has blessed you, because your eyes can see and your ears can hear"* (13: 16).

Help me to dispel any darkness that remains in me.

Lord, I thank you for the spiritual (in)sight you have given me during this Lenten season of preparation for the joy of your Easter rising.
Amen.

Original source unknown



Live in the light this week! Be a light to your world!

Note: Some internet links endure online, others come and go. If a link fails, the owner of the site may have taken it down.

Gender usage in these reflections: We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.

The Sunday readings are from the New English Translation (NET)

Questions and Commentaries © 2023 by [Alfred J. Garrotto](#)

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