

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 2, 2008
1 Samuel 16:1-13, Psalm 23, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41
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Live as children of the light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

The people of Israel wanted to be like their neighbors, they wanted an earthly king, and, while they worshipped God with sacrifices in the Temple, they also worshipped other Gods. Finally God spoke to the prophet Samuel saying: *Listen to the people, in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you.*

However, before God gave them a king he had Samuel warn them what an earthly king would do to them. The Book of Samuel reports, *but the people refused to listen to Samuel. They said “No! but we are determined to have a king over us so that we may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.*

They got what they wanted, Saul was anointed King and in time Saul did what Samuel said he would do. Saul did not obey God and Samuel was angry with him. So God sent Samuel to find another person, David, and to anoint him king while Saul was still alive.

Palm 23 was not yet written but we can almost hear Samuel saying something similar to it. Samuel must have had a sense of walking in the shadow of death, afraid of Saul finding out that he anointed David. And yet, despite his fears he walked with the light of God inside him. In the midst of his fear we can hear him say, *I shall fear no evil for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me.*

Just as Saul walked in the darkness of his own mind, so too did the people of Ephesus, according to writer of this letter. Whoever he or she may have been, the people got the point rather quickly as they read: *You were dead through the transgressions and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. This author is not into pointing fingers at others as he admits, All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. The author then holds out hope For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of the light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in unfruitful works to our Lord. Take no part in unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.*”

Our Gospel reading is rather lengthy story from the gospel of John about a man who was born blind. Keep in mind that, at that time, when anyone suffered a deformity it was considered to be the result of the sin of the person or their parents. This man did not know what it was to see light. He was born blind. He had become accustomed to walking in the darkness. However his darkness was physical, not ethical or moral.

Notice that the man did not ask Jesus to cure his blindness. No one else approached Jesus to cure him. Jesus took the initiative to go to the person, made mud from the dry earth and spit, rubbed it on the man’s eyes, told him to follow the Jewish ritual by going to the pool of Siloam and wash.

The man did as he was told and returned with full eyesight. We can only imagine what it must have been like for him to wash his face and then see his reflection in the water? What did he think when he first looked up and saw people walking around, animals, the sky, and the sun? Prior to this he was a beggar and now he would be able to work for a living. His whole life had been turned upside down and inside out. Worst of all, whereas in the past he got the pity of passers by, he was now becoming the object of ridicule and scorn.

Now it was Sabbath when Jesus made mud and opened his eyes. It's difficult to tell which angered the Pharisees more, Jesus curing the man on the Sabbath or Jesus making mud on the Sabbath. To make mud was to work, which, for some, was to break the Sabbath. There were those who thought Jesus was a sinner – perhaps for making mud, or for curing a person on the Sabbath – and others who wondered how could a sinner do a miracle. They were confused. The man whose eyes were opened was not blind to the issue at all. After his parents refused to take responsibility for him and sent the Pharisees back to their son, the fireworks began.

The Pharisees were adamant. *We know this man is a sinner* they said. It was beyond their comprehension how a man whom they judged to be a sinner according to their standards could work a miracle. However the man made it clear that that was not the issue: *I do not know if he is a sinner .One think I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.*

For him the issue was clear enough. He was blind, Jesus cured him. What more was there to say? Accept the reality and go on with life. The Pharisees could not let go. They kept pushing and he responded again. *Here*

is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. If this man were not from God he could do nothing. Their blindness could take it no longer and they drove him out of the Temple.

Darkness is destructive. We can become so caught up in the darkness of our own thoughts and beliefs that we fail to understand that we are walking in the dark. We can become so outwardly pious and attached to those behaviors that make us look good that we do not see we are surrounded by darkness.

St Francis of Assisi once said, “All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle.” All it takes is one person to hold up the light of faith and see the reaction of the world around them. Gandhi, Martin Luther King, J Krishnamurti, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thomas Merton, Dag Hammarskjold. Katherine Jefferts Schori.

Dag Hammarskjold, the secretary General of the United Nations, once wrote: “So, once again, you chose for yourself – and opened the door to chaos. The chaos you become whenever God’s hand does not rest upon your head. He who has once been under God’s hand, has lost his innocence; only he feels that full explosive force of destruction which is released by a moment’s surrender to temptation. But when his attention is directed beyond and above, how strong he is, with the strength of God who is within him because he is in God. Strong and free, because his self no longer exists.”

Service beyond self. Let go and let God. *Let that mind be in you that is also in Christ Jesus. Live as children of the light.* Regardless of how

we phrase it, the reality is that if we want to walk in the light we have to come out of the darkness of our selfishness and self-centeredness. Again, Hammarskjold says: “The purer the eye of her attention, the more power the soul finds within herself. But it is very rare to find a soul who is entirely free, whose purity is not solid by the stain of some secret desire of her own. Strive, then, constantly to purify the eye of your attention until it becomes utterly simple and direct.”

None of us are perfect but all of us are called to perfection, to be whole. To become whole is to embrace our strengths as well as our faults in such a manner that we acknowledge our character defects and use the gifts of God to help us minimize them. There are those who agree with the song “Oh Lord it’s hard to be humble, when you’re perfect in every way” and there are those of us who look in the mirror and secretly believe this. This is the darkness of the soul whose EGO has **Eased God Out** and replaced God with instant gratification of one kind or another; gossip, food, religion, etc.

To walk in the light is to acknowledge our powerlessness, turn our will and our life over to the care of God as we understand God, seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God and reach out and help those less fortunate than ourselves. To put it another way: when life is difficult leave with a loving God what we cannot understand and go on living. *Live as children of the light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.*