



SERMON 842

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 30, 2014

939th Week as Priest

765th Week at St Dunstan's

30th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

IN OUR BLINDNESS

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

As he passed by, Jesus saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” The blind man did not know that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was nearby, and the blind man never asked to be healed of his blindness.

Rather, Jesus acted; he intervened. This is the very definition of a miracle. It is an interruption of natural reality, a supernatural intervention of the divine into the everyday. The scriptures say that Jesus spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Silo'am.”

And so he did. The blind man made his way to the Temple, where nearby was the rock-carved Siloam pool, fed by an underground spring, and used for the Jewish practice of *mikvah*, or

ritual bathing. Archeologists have determined that this Siloam pool was a commonly-known gathering place for pilgrims arriving at the holy city. So Jesus told the blind man, whose name we never know, to go to a sacred place in the heart of Jerusalem, a place to wash your feet after a long journey, a pool for ritual cleansing in the shadow of the great Temple.

So he did as he was told: He went and washed and came back seeing. What a marvel this must have been! I wasn't blind from birth, but I was extremely near-sighted by the time I was starting first grade. My mother was called to the school, to meet with my teacher Mrs. McNorton. She showed my mother where my desk was placed, a few inches from the blackboard. "This boy is nearly blind," said Mrs. McNorton. "He needs glasses."

Back then you had to go to West Point, Georgia, to see the nearest ophthalmologist. My new glasses arrived at the post office. On the way home, I opened the Red Rider glasses case and put on my glasses. I was amazed!

"Look, Mom," I shouted, "you can see the leaves on the trees! And the Harrises have their name on their mailbox!"

My mother burst into tears. I had been riding my bicycle all over Auburn, to the city pool, to Southside grocery, to Cub Scouts, and to school—with and without my five brothers—unable to see clearly more than a foot in front of me.

But for me, it was a miracle. I was blind and now I could see!

Isn't this the way things go much of the time? We have a sort of blindness about our lives that we aren't really aware of. We think that we know everything exactly the way it is, only to find out that our understanding was partial, inexact, or even fuzzy beyond recognition. We convince ourselves that we are children of light, although we are still stumbling around in the dark. We know in our hearts what is good and true and right, but we hide the truth from ourselves, and we even fool ourselves into believing that we have lived in a way that is pleasing to God. It's time to wake up and smell the coffee. As Dr. Allen told me when he was leaving Auburn, "Father Wells, it's time to grow up." It's time to wash the clay from our eyes and see the world and our place in it with clarity and conviction—and to begin the essential work of amendment of life.

The man's neighbors and friends hardly recognized him after he washed in the Siloam pool. He had been despondent and helpless; now he was filled with laughter and hope. He had been stooped over and broken by his fate; now he was restored to health and jumping for joy. They couldn't believe this was the same person who begged at the city gates day after day.

They called on the teachers, the rabbis and holy men, the learned Pharisees. The people were confused and bewildered: How could a man who was cursed from birth be made to see? The Pharisees questioned him and his remarkable story. They refused to believe him. Everyone knew that his blindness was a punishment for sin! He deserved to be blind—either because of his own doing or that

of his parents'. They interrogated the blind man, and then they did the same with his parents.

Next, they attacked Jesus for healing the man on the Sabbath day. They declared Jesus a sinner, and they reviled the man who was formerly blind for blaspheming against God. And they cast him out.

There is a contemporary parallel in this part of the story as well. Oftentimes when we speak the truth, plainly and with conviction, there are those who cannot accept it. They cannot see it. Instead, they blame the messenger, or they attack the message. But we are called to speak the truth in love, and to make no peace with oppression—no matter the cost.

Jesus found the man and asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (Some translations say, “the Son of God.”)

The man who has been healed, who now can see, replies, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” But surely he knows already that the one who healed his blindness is the Messiah, the Anointed One. He has called Jesus “a prophet,” one who is from God, and one whom God listens to. But Jesus puts all doubt to rest. “You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you.”

This is the clarity and conviction which characterizes John's Gospel. From the start and throughout the story, Jesus says plainly and with conviction that he and the Father are one, that he is the Son of God. And now that we have understood the story plainly and

clearly, let us also proclaim him the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of God. **AMEN.**