



EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL  
CHURCH, GENEVA

**Sermon for Sunday**  
**March 22, 2020**  
**Lent 4**

*One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.*

*John 9:25*

The Gospel Reading today is about seeing things clearly. A man born blind is healed by Jesus and for the first time in his life, he is able to see. It is somewhat ironical that I cannot see any of you in the pews today! I have to imagine you in my mind's eye sitting by your computer screens sharing in the service.

I have a deep admiration for this man born blind. We do not know his name. But it is clear that he is quite a character. I think of him having a chirpy London Cockney accent; of being able to say things as they really are in an unfiltered way; of knowing exactly how to wind up the religious authorities so that they get tangled up in knots. This person has a gutsy character that will speak truth to power and whose throwaway remarks point to the truth of God in Jesus.

The evangelist John brings us on a journey that not only involves the restoration of physical sight but also imparts spiritual discernment – the capacity to see Jesus clearly and to know that he is from God and of God.

When the blind man first recounts his healing experience, he remarks that “the man called Jesus made mud and spread it on my eyes” (John 9:6). At this point, Jesus is described as just a man. But upon further interrogation, the blind man, who is now healed, reflects further and states that Jesus is a prophet (John 9:17). Finally, after he has been castigated, insulted, and thrown out by the authorities, he is sought out by Jesus and at this point he sees Jesus as the Son of Man, the Messiah. He believes and worships him.

The invitation to us is that we might prepare ourselves for the passion of our Lord by seeing Jesus clearly; by grasping that he is indeed God incarnate who will be handed over to be crucified. In Mark's Gospel chapter 8, a blind man from Bethsaida is healed. Shortly after this, Jesus asks his closest followers who do they think that he is. After Peter asserts that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus begins to make the first prediction about his passion, his suffering and death. “Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed...” (Mark 8:31). But the disciples don't see it coming. They cannot grasp the enormity of what they are being told. Even when Jesus tells them a second time after coming down from the

Mount of Transfiguration, they don't get it. The evangelist records: "They did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him" (Mark 9:32). The role of these blind people receiving their sight in both gospels is to invite us to have our eyes opened so that we can see the passion of our Lord more clearly and understand its significance more profoundly.

"We didn't see this coming!" This is the response of many of us as we suddenly wake up to find that the Coronavirus pandemic has actually arrived on our doorstep. Some weeks ago, we learned of a virus called Covid-19. We watched with a detached horror as Coronavirus wreaked havoc in Wuhan, China. But we didn't see it coming to us. Nor did we foresee that the world as we know it with its economic swagger come crashing to a halt; the nonchalant freedoms we have enjoyed of socializing in pubs, going with family and friends to restaurants, dropping by the cinema to watch a movie – all these taken-for-granted freedoms taken from us in a twinkling of an eye.

Our need for clear vision is greater than ever; to discern how to respond to a world that is unrecognizable compared to just two weeks ago. We need to see the extraordinary efforts of doctors, nurses, and medical staff the world over as life-saving and heroic. As the Irish Tsoishseah, Leo Varadkar, said in his St Patrick's Day address: "Not all superheroes wear capes. Some wear gowns and scrubs." And we need to pray that we might see the sick, the dying, the bereaved with the compassionate eyes of God; of a God who weeps at human distress and death.

Along with spiritual insight, we will need God's strength and courage. On Thursday last, my daughter, Connie, a journalist with the Daily Mail, received an email from Martin Clarke, the publisher of Mail Online. He wrote this to all those working for the Mail Online:

"The next few months are likely to define the world we live in for years to come. They will define your individual lives. And how we rise to the challenge of covering them will define our careers... The public trust you to tell them what they need to know. They rely on it. They will also want you to keep them entertained, cheered up and, yes, distracted. We are entering a new and darker period in this unfolding drama. Our countries are effectively cut off from one another. Our cities are going into various forms of lock-down. It may be many months before some of us see each other again face to face, even if we live in the same country.

But somehow we have to carry on.

For those of you working from home that means maintaining your professional discipline – and morale – in isolation for many weeks, if not months. That is going to be harder than you think...

Despite the best efforts of governments, thousands of businesses are going to go bust. Millions of people are going to lose their jobs. Are already losing their jobs.

The economic effects of this pandemic will long outlast the physical effects of the virus which, sooner or later, science will conquer.

I know that I can rely on all of you to play your part.

God bless all of you and your families.”

In the face of calamity, Jesus invites us to see clearly; to foresee what’s coming. To journey with him on the path of sacrifice. To find in death the God-given hope of new life. But to do this with real depth; to see and grasp and understand - this requires us to glimpse the mystery of the crucified God. And we can only do that on our knees, touched by the healing hand of Christ who opens our eyes so that we see reality truly as it is.

“For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

God bless you and your loved ones. God open your eyes that you may see Christ clearly so that you may share his redeeming love and hope with all humanity.

Michael Rusk

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