



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick

4th Sunday of Lent, March 22, 2020

Sermon Title: "Kingdom Glasses"

Gospel Text: John 9:1-41

Years ago I took a group of youth on a mission trip where they would encounter those they normally did not see. And beforehand I handed out a picture of a pair of glasses called Kingdom Glasses. It was a way of talking about seeing the world through Jesus' eyes and not the way we often see. To be more observant, and more compassionate, and less judgmental. With insight. Whenever our walk became challenging, and we were tempted to distance ourselves, we talked about those kingdom glasses. Those glasses helped us remember that sometimes we are spiritually blind in the world. We drive out the thoughts and reality of those around us. We practice distancing in ways that are not healthy while ironically chafing against the ways that are good for us.

Reading the gospel through the eyes of our current reality, it is not lost upon me that Jesus words that resonate differently: there will come a time when no one can work. Where the imperative that is life changing is washing. Where people will argue over what is possible and necessary, and whether someone can teach us something here. This time of distancing is one we did not choose. Most of us are acting like this is a new thing, and in some ways it is. But the act of creating separation is as old as time and in our world lots of folks do not get to choose how they experience this.

Look at all the distancing happening in this story of the man born blind. How long do you think he has been in the world and in the midst of the people and yet unseen? How often do you think that those in authority kept him from community? This man was a beggar- can you envision him begging not only for food or money but just to be given the time of day? How many times did people hide behind "the rules" to exclude him? How frequently was his story unheard, as if he never spoke? Do you see how the people in this story do not trust one another? Look how often the man's story has to be told.
"How is it that your eyes are opened? A man named Jesus put mud on my eyes and told me to go and wash and I did."

The neighbors and those who had seen him AS A BEGGAR were not even sure it was him because they only allowed themselves to see his deficiency and not his humanity.

The Pharisees asked how he now saw- "he put mud on my eyes, then I washed and now I see."

In their eyes, it could not be, so they called in his parents to see if he really had been a blind man, a fact they apparently did not know because they had never bothered to know him.

His own parents distanced themselves out of fear- "don't ask us." They see they might lose their own place in community.

So Pharisees declare he is a sinner- it's a declaration of separation.

A man who had been separated from the community for being blind- seen to be a consequence of sin, is now driven out for being able to see- which should have restored him to community.

And you know that his being driven out was not as calm as the way we read this. It was loud, and confrontational and alarming.

SO much distancing.

In our own time we see it too- or we should. People we label-who are isolated, alone. The disabled, those who are struggling in body, mind or spirit. Those whose lives we judge.

Those we refuse to believe because they tell us what we do not want to hear- so we limit our news and our interactions to those who affirm our viewpoint. Some even deny that what can be clearly seen is real in ways that are loud and confrontational and alarming.

The hallmark of sin is separation and people enact it by driving the man out.

But right as the man in the gospel is cast out, Jesus finds him. Jesus sees him into life again. Calling the man into belief in what God had done and would do for him. Into the kingdom the Son of Man is bringing to us. Erasing the sin that cast him out. The sin of those who refuse to see- who clearly need some kingdom glasses.

In this time, we are being told to socially distance. But in spite of our normal tendencies to separate and divide ourselves into camps of this group or that, have you noticed what is happening? It seems like people are discovering their kingdom glasses.

Choosing to see that while we may be physically distant with one another, we do not have to be isolated like some monk in a cell. We are finding ways to be connected, socially and spiritually. Some ways are new, to some of us, like Live streaming, Zoom, video chat. But other ways have been around a long time and still work just fine- making eye contact and smiling

from a distance, using our phones as phones, and sending mail (the old fashioned kind) or email.

But we are doing more than seeing new ways.

We are seeing new people or re-seeing those perhaps we were not noticing or including. Rediscovering the joy of another human voice, whether it is one we know or not. Here at Grace our Naomi Circle is engaging a Phone a Friend ministry with 35 of our elders. Another 37 of you have committed to call five people once a week as a Phone Check-in ministry. We can use more!

People are offering to pick up items and drop them at the door. Others are changing what they do for something that we need now. Like the distilleries using their alcohol to make hand sanitizer. The pasta maker who is handing out free home pasta making tools. Restaurants making sure affordable meals are available for kids who may be in need. People are looking to help not only those they know, but those they not only do not know, but might normally not think about or want to help.

God is within this.

God is moving amidst us in this time, and creating a beautiful alternative like the one Jesus was creating in the gospel.

A grace-filled, compassionate alternative. Where we stop being blind to each other. And where sin, separation is removed.

Just as Jesus finds the man, we are being invited to find each other- to see each other, to pray for each other, to care for each other. To see differently. Jesus is telling us that when we think we see just fine, we are sadly mistaken. Where we say "we see," our sin, our separation remains. And in God's eyes, that is not good for any of us.

When we ask God to help us see, life is restored.

For the places where you are wearing your kingdom glasses, I give thanks.
For the love you are bringing, I praise God.

Jesus is helping us to see and to believe that God is with us.

May we keep on seeing and believing the beautiful world our Lord wants us to know together. And to God be the glory.

AMEN