

**Lent 4 March 22 2020**  
**John 9, Psalm 23, 1 Samuel 16**

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

Our first reading from the Hebrew Scriptures and our Gospel reading talk about human failures to see clearly and their consequences.

In the reading from 1 Samuel, we find Samuel, the prophet of God, grieving because the first Israelite King, Saul, has turned from God's commands. Samuel grieves because Saul had seemed to be the perfect king, right out of central casting- Tall, handsome, strong, humble, and pious. Think a swarthy Prince Charming from Shrek.

Yet, he had disobeyed God. So now God sends Samuel to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem to anoint, to choose, the next king of Israel. Samuel goes and his heartbeat increases when he sees the eldest son, Eliab. Here again is someone who looks the part of a king! Tall, strong, mature! But God says to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

And so, God's favor passes over all the brothers present. Samuel asks if there is another brother. There is one more, David, the youngest, because he was watching the sheep. When David arrives, God tells Samuel, "This is the one!" This is the one, a boy, small in stature. Certainly not who Samuel or anyone would look to as the greatest king of Israel.

In the Gospel reading from John, we have another illustration of how differently we see things from how God sees. Both Jesus' own disciples and the Jewish authorities assume the man born blind (or at least his parents) have sinned in some way. They can only see the blindness as punishment for disobedience. Further, the Pharisees cannot see that Jesus is at least a prophet and certainly comes from God. The proof is before them, the man born blind was healed by Jesus. Instead of trying to see things with new eyes, they stubbornly stick with their old sight, "We know this man, Jesus, is a sinner." Because he healed on the Sabbath.

The reality is, we do not see on our own the way God sees. Too often we are stuck in certain ways of seeing because of what we know.

Brothers and sisters, the world as we have known it, seen it, with all our assumptions and standards, with all the things we know to be true- has changed. Probably for some time. That thought is not comforting, but one of the things I am learning in this time is to try and see with God's vision. One that does not look at the surface but that looks beneath a thing.

One thing I see- those things that are inconvenience to me: stay home and away from others, work from home, wash your hands- are things that are impossible for some. The homeless, hourly workers in food service, manufacturing, the trades. I see where the weak places in our social fabric are now being torn. I see and catalogue them, to respond to them- like Jesus does in healing the blind man- but also to remember them so that when "normal" comes again we might not return to what we knew, but that we might see a different way of being a nation indivisible.

We walk right now in a dark valley. Covid-19 cases can easily overwhelm our health system if we do not care for one another by physically staying apart from each other, by washing hands, covering coughs, cleaning surfaces, staying home. We walk in a dark valley where we could easily be overwhelmed by fear. By the unknown that lies before us. We walk in a dark valley, except, we have one who walks with us, each of us, all of us. A shepherd who guards us with the rod and guides us with the staff. One who lay down his life for his sheep. For those whom he loves and cares for. We have one who walks with us who has crossed from death to life so that we might live. A shepherd.

Jesus. The one who sees us clearly, into our inmost being- and who loves us passionately. Jesus, the one who has claimed us as his own and in whose name we live, and breathe, and work.

We walk with the one who has walked through death's dark valley and come out the other side. When we walk with that one, we need not fear... for in him, Emmanuel, God is with us. We need not fear, for when we are in his presence, we are filled- to overflowing. With grace and mercy and love.

In Jesus, our shepherd, the one who sees us clearly, we are indeed children of the light as Paul calls us. We are anointed by God just as that boy David was anointed, chosen. So, together, with Christ, let us seek to live as children of the light- even amid the darkness of what we do not know. Let us seek to discern, to see clearly, and do what is pleasing to God, what is good and right and true.

I have to admit I read that passage in Ephesians I thought of Frozen 2. Anna, deep in the cavern, feeling alone-lost-afraid. Sings, and repeats the mantra she has learned – just, take one step, then another. Just do the next right thing.

In 1527, the black plague broke out in Wittenberg, Germany. The whole city, understandably, panicked in the face of this deadly disease. Martin Luther wrote an open letter that would be entitled “Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague” (Luther’s Works 43:119-38). It is a profound and practical reflection on the Christian’s response to death and suffering, the obligations that come from loving one’s neighbor and the legitimacy of self-preservation. For Luther, as in most things, the answer to the question comes down to what vocation holds you most at any given moment. Your vocation as parent to care for your children. Your vocation as caregiver and healer to those who are sick. In each situation he asks, what serves my neighbor best?

He writes in part...

“I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence ... If my neighbor needs me however, I shall not avoid place or person, I shall go freely as stated above. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy ...” (Luther’s Works; Vol. 43, pg. 132)

The next right thing for Martin, was to open his house to those afflicted by the plague- it was a former monastery, so they had plenty of room. It meant staying in Wittenberg when others, with his blessing, fled.

For us, the next right thing is what is good and right and true and pleasing to God. What matches the vocations we have before us. So, as we are keeping physical distance from one another- the next right thing might be reaching out with a

phone call, skype, or a holler across the yard to check in with one another. As we are at home with family far longer than normal, it might be having extra grace for one another. Knowing that outbursts are frustration at the situation, not each other. It might be as simple as kids helping with dishes and keeping your room clean without being asked.

The next right thing might be to give blood. With blood drives canceled, reserves are low. You can contact [Redcrossblood.org](http://Redcrossblood.org) or the Mississippi Valley Blood Center to schedule a time.

The next right thing means staying home as much as we can to slow the spread of this virus and washing our hands, covering our cough, cleaning surfaces. It means looking to and being helpers, like Mr. Roger's taught us.

None of us can see clearly what is to come. But there are some things that I have found in this time- that even for an introvert like me- community is so vital- and that while it is a bit like a foretaste of the feast to come- community can happen even when we have to remain physically distant from each other.

None of us can see clearly what is to come. But what comforts me is to know that I do not walk alone- I have you- my friends in Christ. We have each other, and we have, Jesus, the one walking with us who knows the way forward, even if we can't see it. So, my friends- together with Christ let us breathe and do the next right thing, and the next right thing, and the next right thing- trusting that Jesus will guide us along the way.