

30th March 2014 Fourth Sunday of Lent

1 Samuel 16: 1-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5: 8-14

John 9: 1-41

These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word

Once again the readings from both the Old Testament and the Gospel provide us with graphic narratives, and both stories are also eye-openers, they both have a sense of surprise within them.

In the first reading from 1 Samuel we have the story of David's anointing, and David will play an important part in the continuing biblical narrative, both for the Hebrew tradition and also as a foundation in the Christian tradition.

So we could spend some time looking at the significance of the account we are given in today's first reading, and we could seek to discover the importance and the purpose associated with David's anointing; however we are probably not really that interested in, nor connected to, the significance of David; he is not one of the primary shapers of our life journey.

So rather than pick through the details of the text, we might find more value looking for that which does have interest regardless of the time, place and context of the story, and that can easily be found in verse 7.

"7 But the LORD said 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."

A distinction is made between Divine sight and how we mortal see; *for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.*

And we might therefore consider the question for ourselves; does God see differently to how we see?

Certainly for the initial audience, the answer without hesitation would be of course there is a difference; God sees everything; and that answer is still the answer for many who consider that same question today.

Now hold the question, as we look at two quotes that have often appeared in our service sheets:

"Christ has no body now on earth but yours,

no hands but yours,

no feet but yours,

Yours are the eyes with which he looks with

Compassion on this world,

Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good;

Yours are the hands with which he is to bless now."

— Teresa of Ávila

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"The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love."

— Meister Eckhart

Teresa of Avila and Meister Eckhart both have quite a different understanding of God than the writer of 1 Samuel, and perhaps that's indicative of their appreciation of Christ's revelation.

Christ reveals to us the place of overlap; the Word made flesh, an insight into a humanity that is fully human and fully divine.

And that place as revealed in Christ is our true place of being; which we all know at some level for together we claim to be 'The Body of Christ'.

And so we can now contemplate another question; do we have 'divine sight' and/or can we develop it?

It is an opportunity to consider "what we see", and as we explore the whole idea, we so easily appreciate that our eyes are much more than a lens through which we observe the world around us.

Cameras take a picture; they record exactly what enters through the lens; however it is difficult for us to use our eyes as a camera. Everything our eyes 'see' is immediately interpreted, referenced, perceived, validated and evaluated etc. etc.

Our eyes go beyond 'seeing' and perhaps that's indication of our potential for 'Divine sight'.

The first reading seeks to explain the choice of David over his brothers, and that was clearly not an obvious choice; the explanation is given with a dialogue that ascribes the choice to God.

Perhaps, the reality of the process is that it was with 'Divine sight' that Samuel himself made the choice, however such a reality could not be entertained with the primitive understanding that God is the only one who can see what we cannot see.

The reading on the one hand underplays the activity of Samuel by giving the decision to God; and then on the other hand underlines that it is Samuel's action that brings into reality the future kingship of David, for it is the action of anointing that empowers David.

"Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward."

As we appreciate the process being described in the reading, we find the suggestion that we can give birth to that which we perceive, we can bring into reality something that is seen beyond the vision of our eyes.

David was not visibly a king; yet Samuel 'saw', or rather perceived, the potential within David, he saw something that could not be captured by a camera and then brought it into reality by his action, the action of anointing.

What we see, and what we don't see, has an impact on what we do and what we don't do... regardless of what is there before our eyes.

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Samuel was alive in the overlap and his insight enabled him to anoint David as king, to bring to birth a divine potential that David and his family were blindly unaware of.

What if we can find, in the wilderness of Lent, that same place of overlap, what if we can open ourselves, open our eyes to Divine sight?

Perhaps the starting point is for us to be attentive to those things that we do see; asking of ourselves to what do we give our attention; and in the process becoming aware of our blindness.

With that question in mind, we turn to the gospel; still very much following the same thread, only instead of a differentiation between what God sees and what mortals Jesus uses sight and blindness as the difference, he brings it home to us.

We all know the reality of selective sight and selective blindness, what we are perhaps unaware of is how that shapes who we are and what we do.

A simple cultural example is found in the most common contemporary reference point of our culture, not the bible, but the television news. We watch the news to discover the shape of the world, unaware that it too gives shape to our worldview, and so gives shape to who we are.

According to the news 50% of life's important events occur on the sports field. Of the 50% of the non-sporting events 80% are related to economic welfare and lead us to a worldview of "not enough".

As a generality, the news portrays the world as a fearful place that has daily disasters occurring all over the place.....

If that is what we see we become blind to the divine light that is the very essence of creation

The gospel writer of John seeks to illustrate for us what Jesus reveals for all of humanity, and today we contemplate the possibility that we are beggars who have been blind since birth.

"Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see.."

Paul in writing to the Church at Ephesus affirms that same revelation:

"once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light..... awake! [open your eyes] Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh uses another analogy to say the same:

"Your mind is like a piece of land planted with many different kinds of seeds: seeds of joy, peace, mindfulness, understanding, and love; seeds of craving, anger, fear, hate, and forgetfulness. These wholesome and unwholesome seeds are always there, sleeping in the soil of your mind. The quality of your life depends on the seeds you water. If you plant tomato seeds in your gardens, tomatoes will grow. Just so, if you water a seed of peace in your mind, peace will grow. When the seeds of happiness in you are watered,

you will become happy. When the seed of anger in you is watered, you will become angry. The seeds that are watered frequently are those that will grow strong.”

“awake! [open your eyes] Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.””