

*Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent, 6.iii.2005
St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church / Brogue, Pennsylvania
I Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41
10:30 a.m., Holy Communion - LBW Setting 2*

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come. ✠ Amen.

*"For once you were darkness,
but now in the Lord
you are light."*

-- Ephesians 5:8

That was the problem of the poor soul depicted in today's Gospel, the man born blind from birth but now both healed of his blindness and forgiven of his sin by Jesus. The man can not only now *see* light. He *is* light. The simplicity of his faith and his own veracity, his absolute refusal to be dissuaded from telling how he had his sight restored and his refusal also to let others put words into his mouth, these qualities madden the opponents of Jesus and His

proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God for them was coming, always and only *coming*, but never here, never *now*. Messiah and God's Kingdom could only come under certain signs, only thus and so, and *not* in the form of a blind beggar, now healed of his blindness. *Not* here! *Not* now, no matter what the Prophet Isaiah had said about the blind seeing and the lame walking and the captives being set free by God. By his very existence, by his very unadorned and unlettered faith, the now sighted man cast too much light on the spiritual darkness of those who thought of God and God's reign on earth as abstractions. Here was God's inbreaking Kingdom in the concrete, and what did they do? They drove him from their midst, as though he had done wrong.

The Pharisees, those renewers of Bible study and morality of Jesus' day, preferred the abstract to the concrete,

the potential to the actual Messiah. The actual Christ before their very own eyes just did not conform to their preconceptions, giving people like this sinner their sight back and calling the true believers, like the Pharisees, *blind*. They preferred the lesser light they could contain within the system of their teaching and belief to the great illumination of God's light of love in this world.

We had better be prepared to forgive the Pharisees for that, for we all do the same. Like Samuel, who was bitterly disappointed over Saul because he *looked* like such *royal* material as Israel's first but failed king, like Samuel who would have picked any of David's brothers to replace Saul before he came to the runt of Jesse's litter, we have our own ideas about how, when, where and with whom God works in this world, do we not? Our ideas about holiness and Christian discipleship may not always be pictured as

something in a clergy collar, but we have a hard time seeing God at work in *every* heart filled with mercy and a passion for what is right.

The Holy Spirit *is* at work in those people, most particularly, and they *are* God's light in this world, whether they know it or not, whether they know their Bible backwards and forwards like the Pharisees or whether, whether they choose not to let on that they do, whether they follow another faith path to the very best of their ability and sincerity or whether, like the man born blind, they only know, in all honesty and humility, what they do not know. I have met a few such fellow travelers of the Kingdom of God in my lifetime, and quite a few in the past several months, young people running soup kitchens and food pantries and community clothes closets without a religious label, just because it is the good thing to do for the people of the

community. Does it make us nervous when not only Christians and not only people with some religious identity but also those who profess and choose to profess no religion address the needs of the abandoned and the abused with the same directness Jesus showed in making that mud poultice out of dirt and saliva, right on the spot, standing up against racism and bigotry with the same fire that moved the young Rabbi from Nazareth to select choice words for those religious hypocrites who did nothing for the poor but who criticized those who did *on the Sabbath*?

We are indeed created and reborn children of light by our Baptism, sisters and brothers, but let us not be surprised when we are not the only bright and shining stars of kindness in the night of suffering and injustice. Woe to us if they outshine us, as they very often do. Let us live the light,

but let us not think that the great light of God's love originates in us or that we in any way control it.

A story someone told me, a dialog from the Buddhist tradition, may help us here and, in conclusion, give us something to ponder that seems to me to perfectly compliment today's Gospel. It is a dialog between a wise master and a young, inexperienced monk: "The monk said to the master, 'All light is great, for it is all of the same kind.' 'Indeed,' replied the master, 'the light of the sun *is* great, for by it we can see, though we cannot look upon it. But consider the light of the firefly. It pleases the eye by night, and we may hold it in our hands and look upon it closely, but it is not by the light of the firefly that we may see. So,' concluded the wise master, 'not all light is great, or of the same kind.'" ✠ Amen.

S. D. G. !