

Transfiguration  
Dallas, Texas

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1Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

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When I preached back on Ash Wednesday about Lent being like a Recombobulation Zone, I had absolutely *no idea* just how discombobulated we would all have to get first. Wow. I feel like I've lived a lifetime in these three weeks of Lent. My favorite meme of the last week says, "I didn't know I'd have to give up quite this much for Lent."

I'm so grateful you're with me in spirit, my friends. I know we'd all rather be here, but I also know that the bond that unites us to each other is the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit doesn't know anything about social distancing. So, we're going to keep being the Church *no matter what*. A virus can make us stay home, but neither "things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39)." So do not underestimate the Body of Christ and the power you have as one its members, even where you are. By God's grace, we will endure this, whatever may come.

Speaking of enduring...I want to start this homily with a confession: I wanted to shorten today's gospel story. I tried! Because I know you're watching this on a screen at home, and it's hard to hear long stories through a screen, even when we read it in parts...so I tried this week to figure out a way to make it shorter. I cut out everything but the healing of the blind man and his poignant words of gratitude. After all, how many times have we sung or heard "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see"? John Newton had this miracle in mind when he wrote Amazing Grace.

But the more I sat with the story, the more I realized it's not really about the miracle, or at least, not completely. It's less about Jesus' power to give sight, and more about our stubborn insistence on remaining blind. Put another way, this story is about our ability to become so fixated on all that is wrong that we lose the ability to see how God is at work right in front of us. Which is why we needed to read the whole thing.

Because, in the middle of things you don't understand, it is easy to become focused on the wrong things. That's what happens to everyone in the story, well, everyone except the blind man. In the face of things they don't understand, they all focus on the wrong things. The disciples are focused on figuring out who to blame for the man's blindness – was it him or his parents who caused it? The Pharisees are focused on the fact that the miracle – if there even was a miracle! – happened on

the wrong day, the Sabbath. Even the blind man's parents are focused on their fear, and they let that fear govern how they act.

This is what often happens in the middle of things we don't understand. Like the disciples, we can easily focus on finding someone to blame, someone whose "fault" it is that we're in the situation we're in. Or, like the Pharisees, we can focus on trying to find a simple explanation for what is wrong, something that confirms our preconceived notions and makes us feel better about ourselves. Or, like the blind man's parents, we can just focus on our fear, and let that fear cause us to pass the buck and shrink our courage.

My friends, we are definitely in the middle of something that is hard to understand. This is a crisis unlike anything most of us have ever lived through. And by some accounts, it may have only just begun. Which means we need to be extra careful about what we choose to focus on right now, and resist the temptation to fall into the same traps that caught all the people in this story. We need to resist the temptation to search for someone to blame so that we can feel better about ourselves. Nothing about this crisis will get any better because of our rants on social media. And we need to be careful about jumping to simplistic explanations about why this is all happening. If our summary of the crisis can fit in a tweet, we're probably not helping. And we definitely need to be careful about letting fear govern our lives right now. Fear is powerful stuff, and it can cause us to do things that are totally against our core values.

But, here's the thing – the greatest risk of focusing on the wrong thing in a time like this isn't any of that. The greatest risk for us is the same as in the story – that we'll miss the miracle happening in front of us. That's what happened to everyone in the story - the disciples, the Pharisees, even the blind man's parents – they're all so focused on what is wrong and who's to blame and their own fear that they completely miss what Jesus has just done. They're all faithful people, presumably, but they don't, or won't, see what God is doing right in front of them. It turns out that *they are actually the blind ones*. Their eyes work fine, but they are totally blind to what really matters.

My friends, in the middle of these enormous challenges we're facing, circumstances that are hard to understand, it is more important than ever to stay focused on looking for Jesus. *Because – and this is so important – he is always up to something*. He is the shepherd who leads us through valleys in the shadow of death. He is the light, which no darkness can overcome. He is living water, and his grace always flows down to the lowest places of our lives. And his love is the most powerful force in the world. So by choosing to focus on looking for him, we will bear witness to his ability to raise up things that had been cast down and make new things that had grown old, and bring all things – even things we don't understand – to a good end that we could not have asked for or imagined.

Don't get me wrong, I know this situation is hard and scary. I know we are facing something enormous and difficult. But I also know God is somehow in the midst of it with us. God has not left us to figure this out on our own. We are not abandoned. God is on our side. So rather than focusing on all the wrong things right now, what is ours to do is to look for where and how Jesus is at work and try to get as close to that as possible.

Friends, ask yourself, at the end of this, will you have fasted on a diet of rage and fear, or will you have feasted every day on prayer? Will you have used your time to binge on Netflix, or will you have used your time to reach out with concern to neighbors and family? Will you have spent your days scrolling through Facebook, or will you have savored your days time encountering God in Scripture? Will you have obsessed over your worries about yourself, or will you have found ways to show compassion to people who are far more vulnerable than you?

By God's grace, we can do this. We can get to greener pastures beside still waters. We can reach the other side of a pandemic and realize our souls have actually been restored. We can walk safely through this darkness, because there is a light on our path. So let's hold onto that light. Let's follow the shepherd. Let's keep focused on Jesus. And surely his goodness and mercy will be with us all the days of our lives.