

SPIRITUAL SIGHT

Sermon compiled and written by The Rev. Dr. Ralph W. Bayfield for Fourth Sunday Lent, Yr. A. Material from The Rev. Dr. H King Oehring, *Synthesis*, March 4, 2014, Boyd's, Maryland: page 4.

Sherlock Holmes, the great detective who solved many mysteries, and Dr. Watson, his assistant, went on a camping trip. After a good meal and a bottle of wine, they lay down for the night and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his faithful friend. "Watson, look up and tell me what you see."

Watson replied, "I see millions and millions of stars." Sherlock Holmes then said, "Well Watson, what does that tell you?"

Watson pondered for a minute and then replied, "Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Theologically, I understand that God is all-powerful and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. Why what does it tell you?"

Sherlock Holmes responded, "Watson, you short sighted idiot, someone has stolen our tent."

Surely it is acceptable to start a sermon with a little humor on this fourth Sunday in Lent, also known as Rose Sunday or Refreshment Sunday.

It raises the question in today's Gospel about the man born blind who received his sight. Is it primarily about a person to be healed or a theological question to be solved?

John tells us that Jesus "saw a man blind from birth"(9:1). The disciples, on the other hand ask a question: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" Here the theme of "sight" versus "blindness" comes into play.

Jesus saw a needy person who required healing. The disciples saw a theological problem to be solved. Jesus saw someone hurting; the disciples saw an argument of religion.

Jesus found in this encounter an opportunity to change evil. The disciples found a chance to talk about it. Jesus viewed the man from the standpoint of the future, his life improving with his new sight. The disciples saw him in terms of the past with the tragedy and hardships of his living with blindness. Jesus saw the seeds of redemption, while the disciples were focused on guilt. The disciples asked, "Who sinned this man

or his parents?” The question comes from a long but mistaken assumption that misfortune and illness were caused by sin.”

Jesus is quite clear when he states, “It was not that this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God might be revealed in him.” Jesus replies that the man’s blindness provided an opportunity to demonstrate the life-changing power of God that must be manifested then! As long as Jesus was in the world, he was the true healing light; but when Jesus is no longer with them or us, this work will continue with his disciples and the Holy Spirit.

This passage from John 9:1-41 has special meaning for me. When I was a college chaplain, every Wednesday at seven o’clock in the morning, we celebrated Holy Eucharist in the dinning room of Professor E. Vernon Lewis. The students took turns reading the Gospel lesson and we passed the bread and wine to each other seated around the table. Following the service, Bonnie Lewis, Vernon’s wife brought out breakfast. There was a wonderful bakery in Collegeville which made the most delicious sticky buns, so the breakfast was referred to as the sacrament of sticky buns!

Among the students, was a blind orphan girl, Penny, who attended the college. Professor Vernon had purchased a Braille typewriter and he

typed a number of assignments, tests, etc. for Penny. When it was Penny's turn to read, he also typed in Braille the Gospel lesson for the Communion service, which happened to be our Gospel from John today, about the blind man receiving his sight. Vernon asked, "Do you want to change the lesson? He thought it might be unrealistic for Penny who was blind from birth when a nurse put too much silver nitrate in her eyes.

Penny introduced the Holy Gospel and read the story of the blind man who received his sight. As she was reading the Braille words with her fingers she interrupted her reading at points exclaiming; "I see! I see! Many of us thought, Penny learned the lesson about the blind man receiving his sight as an example of knowing the Lord Jesus. We were wrong.

Penny married Thos another student from "sticky bun days," and they had a child. Some years later, Vernon called me and said, "Penny can see." She's a sighted person! He explained, "We'll never know what made the physical change. Was it that her eyes outgrew the accident at birth? Or was it just a function of nature? Or was it an act of God?"

Vernon was no sentimental fool. He was a scientist. He had been the chief statistician on the Manhattan project that built the atomic bomb while

Penny, Thos and their daughter went to visit Vernon and Bonnie. They called me, as I was then living many miles away from them. Penny, said “It was hard to see, but she could see and distinguish the different colors.” It was very sad when Penny died at an early age, but she went to heaven, having been a sighted person. She gave all the credit to Jesus Christ.

Miracles do happen. They are not the usual events of life. For years, my grandmother prayed to have her hearing restored. She blamed the devil and taught me about faith which can do wondrous things. Penny received her eyesight. My grandmother never received her hearing. But they both had spiritual sight and are with our heavenly Father. Thanks be to God. Amen.