

Year A Lent 4
1 Samuel 16:1-13
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41
Psalm 23

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Misunderstanding, jumping to conclusions, not paying attention, disbelief—these are things that happen to us all. They're also things that we see in the two stories that we just heard. Samuel thinks he knows who God's choice for the new king will be, but he doesn't see with God's eyes. And everyone in the community of the man who was born blind seems unable to see what's really going on—except the man who was healed. Sometimes we resist seeing the truth, when it doesn't fit with our expectations.

The story from Samuel is a fairly uplifting tale of David's selection as the new king. We know that David is going to be God's choice, and so we can have a little chuckle at Samuel's expense as each of the seven older brothers is presented to him—and then is rejected by God. As God says to Samuel, "the Lord does not see as mortals see; *they* look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Even though David is the youngest, and sent out to keep the sheep, he has the inner qualities that God seeks for the next king. And so "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."

This story ends happily for now, and it's good that Samuel obeyed the Lord, and anointed the chosen one, even though it made no sense to him. Unlike some of the prophets, and unlike the religious authorities in the gospel story we heard today, Samuel accepts what he doesn't understand. His preconceptions about who should be king don't keep him from anointing the right one.

In contrast, the story in John's gospel, while it also deals with misperception and disbelief, is much more complicated, and ends much less "happily ever after." Almost everyone seems reluctant to believe in Jesus, or even be adamant that he's done his miracle through demonic power. The formerly blind man himself only gradually realizes that Jesus is "the light of the world," as he goes through the experiences connected to his healing, and then talks with Jesus. In fact, the only person in this story who doesn't *fail* the man born blind is Jesus. The man's family is so afraid of the authorities, that instead of celebrating his healing and supporting him with their testimony, they say, "he is of age. He will speak for himself."

Some members of his community don't even recognize him when he gains his sight. Some think, hey, isn't that the blind guy who begs? "No, but it is someone like him," others say. The man himself keeps saying, "'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?'" His community is so used to using his blindness as his primary identifier, that without it they can't recognize him.

The religious authorities, although they say they are they are the keepers and dispensers of justice and grace, are worst of all. They harass the man, deny that he has been healed, try to get him to implicate Jesus for healing on the sabbath, and then, when the man defends himself and Jesus, they revile him, and kick him out of the synagogue. "Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

This refusal to believe the evidence of one's senses reminds me of a patient that we had in the ICU a few years ago. A teenager had a condition that was curable, but she was not responding to treatment. Instead, she was getting rapidly weaker, and her lungs were filling with fluid. Eventually, the ICU doctor, and the pulmonologist (the lung specialist) told the girl's parents that they had done everything they could do, and that anyone who wanted to say goodbye should be called

as soon as possible. The parents were grieved, of course, but they asked if their daughter could be anointed with oil for healing, which we did. Shortly after that I was called away to the emergency department, and did not see this family for several hours.

When I got back to the ICU the pulmonologist pulled me aside before I even got to the patient's room. "Melanie," he said, "what did you do to that girl?" I explained that anointing involved applying blessed oil to a person, and then asking for God's healing grace. Then I asked what was wrong. "Well, nothing's wrong, but it's not possible, what's happening," he said, looking everywhere except at me.

"What's not possible?" I asked. The pulmonologist then rattled off statistics, test results, and scan results, and said, "this doesn't happen."

"Are you saying that she's getting better?" I asked.

"She can't be getting better," he said flatly. "It's not possible."

"But I thought you just said the fluid in her lungs was significantly decreased since this morning," I replied.

"That's what it looks like, but I don't believe it," he said.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because," he almost whispered, "that would be—well, Melanie, it would be a miracle."

There are times when things happen in ways we don't expect, or don't believe—or don't want to believe. Our preconceptions blind us to what's happening. But if we open our eyes, and turn to Christ's light we will be better able to see what's *really* happening.

Amen

The Rev. Melanie Lewis
Rector, Christ Church Millwood