

Fourth Sunday of Lent
Ephesians 5:8-14, Psalm 23, John 9:1-41
David Teschner
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Sherlock Holmes, the brilliant detective, and Dr. Watson, his able assistant, went on a camping trip. After a good meal and a bottle of fine wine, they lay down for the night and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awakened his dear friend and said, "Watson, look up and tell me what you see?"

Watson replied, "I see zillions of stars."

Sherlock Holmes then said, "Well, Watson, what does that tell you?"

Watson thought for a moment and said, "Astronomically, it tells me 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?"

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

A little laugh on this midway point of Lent, sometimes called Refreshment Sunday, is not at all inappropriate.

And it ties right into our gospel text. Whereas Jesus, we are told, saw an unfortunate blind man as he walked along, his disciples saw a theological quandary when they ask, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus saw a person while his disciples saw a puzzle. Jesus saw an opportunity to show compassion and thus reveal God's glory. The disciples see an opportunity to place blame. Jesus imagined a new future for this man. His disciples can only keep him bound in the past.

We can be like the disciples sometimes, can't we? We can draw all sorts of conclusions by looking at a person and not see or feel his pain and anguish.

Right from the start of this complex passage from John we learn about alternative ways to see, light versus darkness, the blind that see and the sighted who are blind.

I started wearing eyeglasses for nearsightedness in the sixth grade when I was most self-conscious about my appearance. Frames were ugly and very few kids wore them back then. Consequently, I would try to put them on only when absolutely necessary to see

something on the blackboard and then I'd whip them off as quickly as possible and hide them back in my pants pocket. For years I saw only blobs and fuzzy images because I refused to wear the awful things.

I'll never forget the day I got contact lenses in high school and came out of the doctor's office into the light of a spring day. It was as if I was seeing the world for the very first time – vivid green leaves, colorful flowers and brilliant, blue sky.

We can imagine, then, the utter joy the blind man experienced after he washed in the pool of Siloam and for the first time ever could see. This, of course, leads to a huge controversy over how it happened, when it happened and who did it.

What is most sad and distressing about this story is that no one will celebrate this man's great good fortune with him – not his neighbors, not the religious leaders and not even his own parents. He has to rejoice alone, eventually giving Jesus the highest praise by worshipping him as Lord.

This story may have never entered the pages of the gospel if it had occurred on any day other than the Sabbath. Moses brought the commandment from Mt. Sinai, "Keep the Sabbath day holy." The Hebrew word for Sabbath is *shavath*. It means "to stop" or "to cease." From Genesis, we read that God rested on the seventh day after completing the creation of the world in the first six days. The Jewish Sabbath, then, was a day to cease from work and rest. On the Sabbath, the Jews were to be reminded, as I understand it, that the world could function just fine for one day a week without their help, because, after all, the world and everything in it was God's. The Sabbath was a day to trust all to God's care. The rest of the week would go better if they could remember that. It is still true for us as we consider how to keep our Sunday Sabbath holy – different from all other days.

By the time of Jesus, the Jewish rabbis, scribes and leaders had carefully developed detailed guidelines as to what constituted work and, thus, which actions were legal and which were illegal on the Sabbath. Mixing dirt with saliva to make mud was considered work and, therefore, illegal. Healing, in this case, was off limits because it could just as easily have waited until tomorrow after the Sabbath.

Jesus, however, was convinced that God had never intended to restrict mercy and compassion on the Sabbath, and that's what he was all about and always about doing.

The bottom line then is that the Pharisees couldn't see beyond their own rules. Their vision was very nearsighted. Even a miraculous and life-enhancing healing couldn't budge most of them from their long and hard held positions.

We can be that way too, so stuck in the old and familiar way of doing something or thinking that we cannot entertain something new and different. And often we initially at least consider the person or group that presents something new as suspect or perhaps evil. We may even treat them with derision and cruelty.

Carol Harston wrote in an online spiritual resource I receive, "To take the Lenten journey is to walk away from life as we know it and walk towards life as God dreams it."

Jesus lived God's dream and spoke of God's dream. He called it the Kingdom of God. The dream and the light he revealed exposed the world's darkness. The blind man with new sight was driven out and Jesus would be crucified. We are called to be light – to see everyone as Jesus saw them, to love everyone as Jesus loved them.

Surely we are not blind, are we? Not if we wear our Jesus glasses all the time. AMEN.