

Healing Blindness

A Sermon by Rev Brian W. Keith

Blindness is a terrible affliction. Imagine not being able to see the incredible array of colors, especially when fall is drawing near. Imagine not being able to read a map or see the beauties brought to us through the lenses of cameras. And imagine not being able to see a child ride his bike or a friend smile. While a heightening of the other senses can enable someone to manage without sight, a wonderful element is thereby removed from life, and the person is surrounded with a shroud of darkness.

While natural blindness is certainly a frustrating and painful condition, it merely reflects the kind of problems where there is spiritual blindness in our lives. Spiritual blindness causes us to flail around in our lives, not really knowing or being certain of what we ought to do or what kind of person we can become.

Spiritual blindness exists wherever there is ignorance. Where someone lacks a knowledge of who the Lord really is, of the process of regeneration, and of the nature of the world the Lord intends us to live in forever, there is a terrible void in a person's life. Yes, someone can go through life, attending to numerous responsibilities, doing his job, taking care of the home, and apparently being a healthy, useful member of society. So where there is ignorance about spiritual matters, that life is shrouded in darkness. It is without any real purpose or direction.

But worse than that are those whose religious beliefs foster blindness. Those who have been taught that matters of religion are best left to the theologians and cannot be understood by the average person are having their spiritual eyes put out. For when someone is told to accept something on faith with no real understanding, with no real appreciation of the truth, there is a darkening and claustrophobic feeling.

Spiritual blindness is not simply a problem of whether one can recite information or even feel comfortable just understanding how the world works. For being blind spiritually has significant problems even as natural blindness does in this world. As our natural sight enables us to see hazards to avoid them and shows us better paths to follow, so a spiritual sight of truth can lead us to steer around hellish situations and direct us on heavenly paths. And fortunately, where spiritual sight is

lacking, our lives are often reduced to the lowest common denominator, namely what we want to do. Sometimes what we want to do is all right, but often it is not all right. In fact it may be destructive, self-centered, and painfully hurtful to those around us. If we don't have a clear sight of the difference between right and wrong, then anything we desire to do may seem all right.

The example given from the lesson in Divine Providence is most telling in this regard. Where there is not a clear sight of marriage, of how one man and one woman can deeply love each other and receive a genuine eternal love that is different from any other from the Lord, it is so easy to justify all manner of less-than-orderly situations. Without a clear vision of marriage, adultery seems relatively unimportant, simply a friendly contact between people, not much different from shaking hands or talking in a restaurant. Casual sexual relations can easily be justified wherever there is not that clear sight of what sex can mean inside of marriage and how destructive it is outside of marriage.

A miracle the Lord did in healing the blind man points to how our blind spots can be healed, how we can see to walk in the Lord's path.

As the Lord was in a small fishing village by the Sea of Galilee named Bethsaida, some people brought a blind man to Him wanting the Lord to heal him. It is noteworthy that the blind man did not call out to the Lord nor perceive Him by Himself. For one of the traits of spiritual blindness is the lack of recognition that one needs any help. Often we don't know where our blind spots are. We think we see things so clearly that our way is the right way, that all others are wrong. It's only when others bring us to the Lord, pointing out an imperfection that we have, challenging a tradition, that we have the possibility of being healed.

Obviously the people who brought the man assumed that the Lord could heal him; they could not. Our blindness is never really healed by other people. Yes, we listen to them, have them criticize our ideas or suggest different ways for us to live. But their talking means little or nothing to us unless we sense something of the Divine there. Even as that blind man did not resist their taking him to the Lord, so our blindness can begin to be cured when we allow others to lead us to where the Lord is in our lives.

Interestingly, unlike many other miracles done immediately, the Lord took the man by the hand and led him out of town. Naturally there's no

good reason for this to occur because the Lord could heal anywhere He wanted. But spiritually the town Bethsaida describes the state of hell in which we may be living. When we are actually doing what's wrong, living in a disorderly way, the Lord can't heal us. It's only when we step out of the problem and move away from the situation that we are willing and able to have our eyes opened to what the problem really is. If we are locked into one way of looking at things or one method of behavior, our eyes cannot be opened.

Then the Lord spit in the man's eyes. While we would consider this a rather unclean approach, the fluid from the Lord's mouth was symbolic of the truth that He wants us to see. What's more, it affects us when it hits us in the eyes. When we realize that the Lord is telling us not to embellish our stories, in effect lying to make ourselves look better, then we see what the Lord is telling us.

The Lord also put His hands on the man. And what this means is a communication of everything of one's life. For the message is that our spiritual eyes are not opened to what is good and evil simply by the facts being told to us. Rather it's when we sense that this is the Lord's message for us to help us not to condemn, not to harm but when we sense the Lord's love and mercy there, then our eyes are opened.

It's interesting that the Lord posed a question to the man, asking him if he saw anything. Now the Lord was not so unaware as to what the effect would be that He was seeking information from the man for His own sake to see if the miracle worked or not! The purpose of His question here, as with all His questions, is to encourage us to respond. Yes, the Lord does know everything about us, but He wants us to understand by thinking and by speaking. It has been said that no one truly knows anything until he is able to explain it to a child. The process of struggling to grasp an idea so that it can be communicated to someone else anchors it in our minds in a way not possible otherwise. This is why the Lord asked the question, not because He needed to know but so that the man could analyze what was happening to him. What this means for us is that as we are taking in information from the Lord's Word, it will tend to be pushed to the most remote parts of our memory unless we are engaged in talking about it with other people. Perhaps we are wondering about how the Lord's providence works, say when there's an unexpected death or an apparently amazing bit of good fortune. We can wonder about the subject, read about it, and really feel as if we have gained a new insight. But if we don't share that with others

by trying to express it to them, it will tend to drift off and be forgotten. And we should not assume that we are just imposing our ideas on others, be they within our small circle of friends or even outside of the church. Because if someone is a friend, he or she is interested not just in spending time with us but in hearing what we think. To communicate ideas is not to impose but to share.

The man whose sight was being returned then responded that he saw men "like trees walking." The reason his sight was not clear at first is that our initial grasp of any subject is rather stiff and unfocused men like trees. For we can't come to all the answers right away. To gain deep insights into providence, into the process of regeneration, does not occur immediately. For wisdom is not synonymous with our first instruction. Yes, we sense the presence of the Divine and we are excited by the light that we see there. This is the light of the trees walking. But our sight is obscure and we shouldn't be upset when our initial thoughts of a subject or our initial understanding of a subject is flawed.

The Lord did not leave the man in that quasi-seeing state. He put His hands on the man's eyes again and had him look up, at which point he was restored and saw everyone clearly. The Lord's putting His hands on the man a second time describes a kind of illustration, enlightenment, that comes after we have digested ideas and worked with them for a while. What this means is that we can't assume our knowledge on any subject is adequate or that it is sufficiently organized in our minds to see clearly. Our blindness, at least a haziness, remains until the Lord is able to place His hands upon us again. For this to happen we need continual contact with the Divine. The man who saw men like trees walking could have left it at that point. He could have been satisfied with a partial restoration. But he stayed. The Lord wants us to stay too. He wants us to continue the process of learning, of thinking, and of gradually understanding so that our first sight is not our last.

The sight that the man regained can be ours when we have a depth of understanding of what is true, not simply a knowledge of the facts, not a rudimentary understanding of them, but a clear sight of what they mean. So when we think about the teachings revealed in the New Church about a life after death, they are not simply ideas that are interesting or attractive, but they are an expression of the Lord's love and mercy and a description of what can be ours. They come alive when we sense their

power and the fact that they are not abstractly applied to someone else, but they are intended to depict for us what the Lord would give us.

Or when we think about the ideas concerning use, our ability to affect others for the better, they can at first be very general unfocused ideas that we ought to have a job and do something productive with our life, an idea which is men like trees walking. But when we sense the Lord's presence in what we do for other people, even in the mundane tasks that don't seem to be well rewarded here, then we see clearly and are able to see light that really is the Lord's presence with us.

Blindness exists with everyone. And the Lord constantly works to heal that blindness. If we will allow ourselves to be brought into the Lord's presence by the questions or encouragement of our friends and loved ones, and if we will then allow the fluid truth from the Lord's Word to touch our unseeing eyes, it will allow Him to touch our hearts so that we may know that He is our God. Then we may begin to see. At first it will not be clear or perfect; many will be the times we will see men like trees walking. But if we allow the Lord to remain with us, if we retain our contact with Him in the Word and in worship, then He can continue to touch us, healing all our blindness, giving us a sight of all things living.

This is the Lord's will for us, that from being blind we might see, that from being trapped by falsities and distorted ideas we might have a true picture of what heaven is like, both after death and in our life now.
Amen.

Lessons: Mark 8:22-30; DP 144