

SEEING SPIRITUALLY

Ephesians 5:8-16

John 9:1-41

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TEXT: Ephesians 5:8-9 “For once you lived in darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.”

PURPOSE: To remind us that Jesus has already given us spiritual sight which enables us to live in his light and communicate his power and his love to a deeply distressed world.

There’s a concept of church which I generally have rejected because of the ways that it’s been misused. That concept is the distinction between ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ church. The way it’s generally been understood, the visible church is what we typically see: buildings, clergy, people, the business of being an organization. The invisible church is the true church— it’s the believers only known to God who are the actually saved ones. I hope you can see how this idea could be abused. But today, the congregation gathered in worship is a literally invisible church. Those of us here in our building can’t see those of you tuning in. We won’t hear you singing. We won’t know if you’re still wearing your pajamas. We won’t know if you’re doing the Sunday crossword while this service plays in the background. But all of us, no matter who we are or what else is going on in our lives, by the grace of God and the uniting power of the Holy Spirit, are being church today. And I am immensely grateful for the privilege of being church with you and with millions of people around the world who are worshiping remotely with their congregations. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Today we are a church gathered beneath the cross of Jesus Christ, which means, we are a church living in solidarity with people who are suffering, anywhere and for any reason, but especially those whose suffering is associated with the outbreak of this virus. We also are a church comprised of Easter People, people who, using the stunning phrase from the letter to the Ephesians, *are light* in the Lord. Our way of living as Easter People bears witness to God’s power for life over death, for love over fear, and for light over darkness. As we find our way through this unprecedented time, may we keep the cross before us and the Easter hope within us.

The story of the healing of the man born blind is a rich and complex story. What are we to make of it? The story suggests that as some people, through the power of Jesus, become able to see, others, by refusing to recognize who Jesus is, become more entrenched in blindness. The story asks us a question: What difference does it make for us to see with the sight that Jesus gives? It seems to me that it’s not what we see that’s different; it’s what we make of what we see. Apply this to the totally disrupted state of our world and our personal lives right now. Of

course the eyes of faith see the spread of the virus and the difficulties responding to it, and the economic hardship all this is imposing on so many people. But the eyes of faith also see Jesus at work. The eyes of faith also see the light that he is shining in the darkness, light which the darkness cannot overcome. The eyes of faith see how this crisis is causing the world to recognize our incredible interconnectedness – an interconnectedness which has facilitated the spread of the virus, to be sure, but even more important, an interconnectedness which has increased compassion for those most at risk and those risking themselves to help. The eyes of faith are seeing how this crisis is forcing us to reexamine our priorities. It turns out that life's value isn't measured by us being able to do whatever we want. Life's value is measured by our capacity for committing to the common good, and by human connections, even virtual ones, that nourish our souls. Life's value is enhanced not by having enough toilet paper, although that would be very nice, but by faith that yields peace and resilience in the present, and confidence in the One who holds the future. The sight Jesus makes possible enables us to see how the light that he is continues to overcome the darkness of our world, whether that's a darkness of an incredibly insidious virus, or the darkness of poverty, war, and injustice which is the daily bread of too many of God's precious children.

The passage we heard this morning from the Letter to the Ephesians makes this bold assertion: once, we were in darkness. But now, in the Lord, we are light. *We are light*, because our life is life in Christ, who is the Light of the World. Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (John 9:5) Ephesians says, "As long as his followers are in the world, we are the light of the world." The sight Jesus gives enables us not only to see differently, but to act differently. C.S. Lewis, a great Christian writer of the mid-twentieth century, best known for authoring *The Chronicles of Narnia*, wrote that Christ has endowed his followers with what he called, "the good infection." (in Mere Christianity) Could there be a better metaphor for Christian living in these fear-of-bad-infection days?

While of course we await a medical antidote for the virus, we spread the good infection of the life of Christ– the good infection of love overcoming fear; the good infection of community overcoming isolation; the good infection of holy peace overcoming worldly anxiety. The author of the letter to the Ephesians knew about this good infection when he wrote that the fruit of being light is "found in all that is good and right and true," and that we who are light try to do what pleases the Lord. The passage ends with the writer advising his readers to

“be careful how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.” Eugene Peterson’s rendering of the Bible called *The Message* puts that advice in terms that are just right for our precarious days: “So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!” Desperate times, indeed. But we are not the children of desperation. We are the children of light. We are not wallowing in the darkness of crippling anxiety and selfishness. We are light overcoming that darkness because of the sight Jesus has given us, and because seeing differently makes it possible for us to be different.

No one can predict how this crisis will play out, how long it will take to be resolved, what will be permanently changed because of it. What we can be sure of is that the light of the world continues to shine in the world. What we can be sure of is that Jesus still is making all things new, still giving sight to those who were blind, still transforming people to be his light in the world. We have been given grace sufficient to live in that blessed assurance, grace overflowing to pass that good infection along to others. As we find our way, as we watch our step and use our head and wash our hands, may we find true joy in seeing what God is up to, right now, in this world, and being the people, the visible church, God needs us to be.