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Emanuel's Ev. Lutheran Church • Bellevue (Pittsburgh), PA
April 3, 2011 • Fourth Sunday of Lent (A)

1 Samuel 16:1-13
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

In the season of Lent, we become more aware of the dark places in our lives and in ourselves. That is why our worship includes a confession with more time for prayerful reflection. That is why we sing the Kyrie, “Lord have mercy.”

In the season of Lent, we also experience a renewed sense of who Jesus Christ was and is: our teacher and Lord, the long-awaited Messiah, God's Son.

Both of these Lenten threads meet in scripture today. Our stories reveal how God meets us where we are and opens our eyes – both as individuals and as communities.

As you listen, please ask yourself. How have my eyes been opened, either long ago or just recently? How is God's light working to transform our lives and our world right now?



In our long gospel lesson, we hear of God bringing light and sight to someone's life. With a little spit and dirt, and a gentle touch, Jesus healed a man who had been blind since birth. (*Jn. 9:6-7*) He could see for the first time ever! We hear tales of the conversations that happen afterward – the

disbelief. People asked the man what happened. They called up his parents to hear their perspectives on the miracle.

This man received more than just the healing though. As for all of Jesus' miracles, it wasn't just the ability to see. The man was called upon to testify, or explain, what happened, several times over. As the reading continues, we hear a growing certainty, of faith understood and named. The healed man said of Jesus, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." (*Jn. 9:33*) Finally, after the man was cast out from the community, Jesus asked him. "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (*Jn. 9:35*) After the healing, and retelling his story several times, it was clear. The man said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped him." (*Jn. 9:38*) The gift of faith had been given, and received.

In this story, the Jewish community around this miraculous healing also began to see anew. We hear comments that reveal a common assumption. People had assumed that the blindness was a punishment from God, showing that the man was one who sinned and was not faithful to God. The people said to the healed man, "You were born entirely in sins, and you are trying to teach us?" (*Jn. 9:34*) Jesus began to teach them a new way of considering disability. He said that, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." (*Jn. 9:3*)... just as all of us are born to reveal God to the world. The community was not won over quickly. They rejected the teaching and sent

the healed man away from them. But seeds of faithfulness were planted, preparing for new birth to come.



Our Old Testament lesson, from *1 Samuel*, is a snippet of a larger story, which includes lots of eyes being opened. It tells of a time when God shone light on “unfruitful works of darkness.” (*Eph. 5:11*) Saul had been serving as the first king of Israel, after many years of Jews longing for a human king. He was faithful in that role for a while, and then things began to go differently.

But then Saul started to not follow God’s guidance. In the previous chapter, God had spoken to the prophet Samuel, to bring light to the darkness in Saul’s kingship. The message of God’s words invited Saul to repent and seek forgiveness. In them, he received an important personal message, and it marked the end of his reign. But where would that leave the people of Israel?

This is the point when our lesson begins. “The Lord said to Samuel, ‘How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel.’” (*1 Sam. 16:1*) Earlier when God had called Samuel to anoint Saul as king, Samuel had joined God’s visions and hopes for the new king, and for the nation of Israel. The prophet must have been disappointed with how it worked out, and grieving the loss of a vision including the king he helped choose.

After such rocky times and grief, the Lord brought Samuel the chance opportunity to participate in new life for their community. The prophet was sent out to find another king – to be a part of a continuing vision of hope and promise for Israel.

The prophet was resistant. He was worried about being killed, and what would happen. In those moments, God offered him guidance and protection. Samuel learned how best to live his vocation as a prophet. God was faithful at revealing who would be best to be the next king. It was not the most impressive candidate. He was not as tall or glitzy or strong as the others. When the moment came, the Lord was clear, so that Samuel could see as God saw. God said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” (*1 Sam. 16:12*)

Amid the disappointment and grief, over human brokenness and sin, God brought gifts of healing for the prophet Samuel. He was invited to be an integral part of the next steps. And even after darkness, God offered a new, hopeful vision, for both Samuel and for Israel.



Our stories reveal ways that God opens our eyes, both those of individuals and communities: by healing us of sicknesses, and relieving us of burdens; by giving us the gift of faith, and by helping us grow in that faith; by teaching us the truth with love; by being with us in our disappointments and mourning; by offering us guidance and clarity when we need it most; by calling us to vocations and ministries of value; and by

bringing new life to people and places, where we have only seen death and sin and brokenness.

Our God is good. How have your eyes been opened? How is God's light working to transform our lives and our world right now?

Let us pray. Gracious and holy God, give us diligence to seek you, wisdom to perceive you, and patience to wait for you. Grant us, O God, a mind to meditate on you; eyes to behold you; ears to listen for you word; a heart to love you; and a life to proclaim you; through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

(“Those seeking a deeper knowledge of God, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p 76)