

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, yr. a, 3/22/2020

1 Samuel 16:1-13; John 9:1-41

Here's Mud in Your Eye – Rev. Dr. Deborah M. Jenks

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In 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel we hear, "... for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

The Lord looks on our hearts. It's an unnerving idea - that God see into our hearts and to the heart of everything. It's scary, because we human beings can be cautious about revealing very much of ourselves to others. We don't always like to show others too much of what we're feeling. It makes us vulnerable. From the very first time someone doesn't believe us when we say something, or dismisses what we have to say as unimportant, or brushes off our experience and our understanding as of no account; we become cautious, often identifying with our problems or shortcomings etc. We learn to protect ourselves with an outer shell of appearance. We guard our feelings and our thoughts so that we won't be hurt by the dismissal or disregard of our ideas, our feelings, our desires, our love, all that we care for and care about.

We protect our hearts with outward appearances. We cloak and mask our true thoughts and feelings in many different and creative ways. Sometimes, like the blind man's parents in our Gospel reading, we use our fears – often legitimate fears – to justify keeping silent. We don't after all want to upset things. We just want to keep things as peaceful as possible. Sometimes, like the blind man's neighbors, we give full reign to our curiosity. We stir things up just to see

what will happen, or to bring some excitement to our lives to make us feel as if we are truly alive and as if we are making a difference. Or else we stir things up to deflect our attention or the attention of others from having to look more closely at things that are too hard for us to face. And sometimes, like the Pharisees, we cling to a rigid, narrow certitude about how things should be, how they're supposed to be. And then turn around and use that certitude to cover our own mistakes or ambivalence, to turn back anything that might contradict or challenge the sensible, well-ordered world we have created with our certainties.

Yet 'God does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'" How does God break through our self-protecting, outward appearances to heal our hearts, to bring light to our darkness? When God looks on your heart, what does God see?

As they are walking along the road, Jesus and his disciples see a man blind from birth. The disciples, perhaps seeking to reassure themselves of their own salvation, look to outward appearances – to commonly accepted understanding of how the world and God works – and ask Jesus, "Teacher, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" Jesus denies that anyone's sin is responsible for this man's blindness, but in his blindness – in whatever it is that makes this man seem diminished in the eyes of others, or makes him not whole or imperfect – God's light, God power of love can be revealed. And then Jesus engages the man, touches him – he may not have

been so touched in many years - Jesus spits on the ground, making mud, rubs the mud on the man's eyes, tells him to wash, and he is healed... not simply healed, but made new ... given sight, not just restored.

In response to this giving of sight, everyone thinks they know what happened, what's going on: The neighbors who see it as cause for excitement and sensation, but do not think to rejoice with the man born blind at his healing; The religious authorities who are certain in their knowledge that someone is a sinner in this situation; The blind man's parents who are afraid to tell the truth and so keep silent. Everyone thinks they know what is going on and protects themselves accordingly, except the man who once was blind and now can see. He doesn't know exactly what happened, or who Jesus is. But one thing he does know, one thing he knows from his heart; once he was blind, and now he sees. And now, newly seeing, seeing everything as if for the first time, seeing everything without the protective shells of outward appearances, he sees as God sees – with a heart of love.

When God looks on your heart, God sees everything. And what God sees, God loves. By that love, God breaks through the shell of our outward appearances – whether its an image we hate about ourselves or one we hide behind – and brings us face to face with everything that makes us feel small, vulnerable, hurt and unloved in this world, so that we might see through it all, see it for what it is, and be healed – well not just healed, restored, but new. Healed

so that we might see what God sees in each and every one of us, in each and every human being. To look with God on the heart and not on the outward appearance is a risky thing. But it is the way God's grace works within and among us, so that all who once were blind may now see. Amen.