

“Spiritual Blindness”  
Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 16:1-13;  
Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

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Sometimes we have surprise parties. If you've ever gone to a birthday party where you've waited and watched for somebody to come in, and all of a sudden you jumped up and shouted, “Surprise!” when they came through the door, hopefully it was unexpected and it was a joyful event. The trouble is that not all of life has those joyful kinds of unexpected events. It feels like we're in the midst of one of those kinds of events today that is not so joyful. It is an unexpected event, and yet it happens. We recognize that we are affected.

It seems like our world is so defined by the virus news and events that our world is turned upside down. We begin to isolate from one another. Things are shut down and we struggle with how we will work with this unexpected event.

Our scripture today also talks about some unexpected events. Perhaps not quite along the exact same vein, but I think we can begin to learn from these unexpected events. Samuel, we hear, gets a directive from God. It's not really what he wanted. He wasn't wanting to go find a new king. And yet God gave him this direction, so he goes. Unexpected as it was, he followed what God suggested he do, and as he did that, he had a conversation with this family—Jesse and all of his sons—and again there was this unexpected event. It was the youngest son who was chosen to be king. We see in this little vignette that God was working in the unexpected in Samuel's life, in David's life and in Israel's life.

Our Call to Worship this morning came from Psalm 23. We didn't follow it quite exactly, but it is a familiar psalm. We often use this psalm, particularly when we're having a memorial service, to remember that God will meet us and does guide us. In some ways, it is also an unexpected psalm. It seems to me I often live my life not really expecting God to be my shepherd, not really expecting God to be the one who shows me the good pasture and clear waters and the rest. I often think I do that part on my own. I expect that I can take care of myself. It's in these times when we confront the unexpected that we realize how little control we have. We can look again to God as the one who comes in the midst of it all, the one who is the Good Shepherd and can guide us.

In this time of the unexpected, we wonder how we might deal with these events. In Ephesians, there's a phrase that's used: Sleeper, awake! Sometimes I wonder if we can use this little unexpected moment as a way of thinking about something new. What might God use this unexpected moment to wake us up to?

We are being forced to give up some of the things we normally do in our lives. We may find that this is a time to think about what God might be doing with us.

The blind man didn't expect Jesus to come along and give him this mud paste. The discussion wasn't really with the blind man. It was with the disciples, and all of a sudden Jesus gives this man his paste and tells him to go wash. The man finds that he now has his sight. An unexpected event. The interesting thing about this is that as he has this unexpected encounter with Jesus; it allows him to encounter the very love of God. Jesus heals him and brings him new life.

I wonder, then, if we can use this time to allow ourselves to encounter the love of God again, to recognize that God is with us, to recognize the love of God that heals and restores and brings goodness.

In this story, the Pharisees took a fair amount of time to figure out whether they should pay any attention to this unexpected event. Can they see this healing as something God is bringing? In the end, they reject it. They are unable to accept that God might work in a way in their lives that they didn't expect. They didn't expect God to come through this guy, Jesus. They expected something different. They expected that he would be aligned with them, that he would follow their rules.

I wonder if, instead of being like the Pharisees, we can look at what Jesus is doing and see his healing as a gift of God. So often we think of Jesus as Saviour, saving us. We think of Jesus as teacher. I wonder how often we think of Jesus as healer, even though the word for *saves* really comes very close to the word for *heal*. Jesus as healer.

I was reminded this week that we might try to reclaim that, to think about what it means to think of Jesus as healer in our time. Sometimes what I want is for Jesus to simply heal this whole virus thing and get rid of it. But even as Jesus walked among the folks of his day, he tended to heal individuals. I don't quite understand the nature of his healing. He invites us, I think, to pray for healing and to recognize that God is at work in that kind of healing as well. One way, however, that I think he invites us to be healers is by what he teaches us about caring for one another. To love one another. It's amazing how much caring heals.

When we care about something, we pay attention to it. And in paying attention, the problem gets the attention it needs to be taken care of, to be healed. When we walk with somebody through struggling times, the caring of that walk is healing. When somebody walks with somebody through medical issues and is an advocate for them, there is a healing work being done. I'm

wondering if there's a way in which we're invited to think in this time about how we might be those healers.

I ran across a story this week about an emergency room doctor at San Francisco General, who was coming into the ER one day and accidentally dropped something, maybe his phone, in the trash on his way in. So, he had to go after it. He was surprised to find a number of prescriptions in the trash. Some of those prescriptions he had probably written. They were probably prescriptions for pain, antibiotics, possibly insulin. What he realized was that the patients were given the prescriptions but didn't have the resources to fill them, so they were worthless. They threw them away.

As we think about how our system can be overwhelmed by this particular virus and as we struggle to make sure that it's not, and as we worry about how we or a loved one might get medical assistance in this time, can we also think about those who already wonder if they can get medical assistance, if they have the resources to get what they need?

Perhaps this is a time we can take to wake up from the sleep of normalcy and to see what's going on in the world around us, to wonder at how God cares, what God sees, how God's love wants to be expressed through us and through God's people. Perhaps we can begin to think about what it means for us to see in that way.

The other side of the coin is so easy because it's almost become normal for the news to overwhelm us with things that are just incredibly bad. It makes it feel like the world is always falling apart. I can get caught up in this news about the virus and I'm so focused on it that I don't see anything else. Yet, if I think for a moment and I notice the world around me, there is still beauty. Spring is starting to show forth the beauty of God. The flowers are starting to come up. I'm beginning to see the depths of people caring for one another. I see the desire to see how we can help one another and keep in touch with one another in the midst of this difficult time. I think we can continue to love our neighbor. Or, I can spend my time worrying. I can spend all my time thinking about all the things that are happening in the world, but if I knew I just had a bit of time left, that's not what I want to be doing. What I want to be doing, whether I have years or days, is spending my time noticing the beauty around me and participating in the caring that's present in my community. I want to be loving God's children, trusting in God's goodness, preparing myself to live forever in God's house.

As we go through this time, I want to continue trusting in God and caring for God's children. I will continue to worship God and to praise God for the life he's given us, and the grace he's shown us, and the knowledge that I have that I can

depend on him to be my shepherd, and to make it through whatever comes, and to eventually be with my God.

So, I invite us to continue to care for one another—prudently. Care for one another as we can run errands, as we can call one another, as we can support one another, as we can open ourselves to the way God might be at work.

At the very end of this passage, Jesus is inviting us to see spiritually. What does this mean, to see spiritually? I suspect it is not to see supernatural things but, through the work of the Spirit, to see what God would have us see. God loves the world and all the creatures in it. God wants us to love the world. God sees the world in its need and so loves the world that he sends his only son. I think seeing spiritually is beginning to see as God sees. To see the needs that God sees. To see how we can care as God cares. In the midst of this crisis, this time of worry, we are invited to continue to trust in God and to see how we can care for one another even as God cares for us.

May the grace and peace of Christ be yours. Amen.