

4th Sunday in Lent A 19 March 2023
John 9:1-41
St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth
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Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' Let's pray: ...

Jesus and judgement. What does that mean for us?

Jesus as prophet, and judgement, concerns everything that goes on in our world today. In light of the Prophet Jesus and his judgement, what are we to make of what's happening with security, border control, healthcare, education, housing, homelessness, refugees, hunger, poverty, violence, war, drugs, so on and so on? How might Jesus as prophet help us there? I think the Prophet Jesus and his judgement have something to say about what it means to be a neighbour, especially those who differ from, frighten, or threaten us. The One who is coming to judge guides our way.

Prophets and judgement tend to make us squirm a bit. Prophets speak words we don't want to hear. They show us truths we don't want to see. They ask us to change. And judgement induces anxiety about wrong-doing and punishment.

Prophets generally don't work within the system. They stand outside the system and work against the injustices and abuses perpetrated by the system. Prophets speak against that which diminishes human dignity and impoverishes life.

Think of the prophetic work of Martin Luther King, Jr, in America, Mother Theresa in India, Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador, or Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa. They called the people of those times and places to see and live differently. And behind each of them stood the Prophet Jesus, making his judgement incarnate through them.

But it's not only the big names who are called to prophetic work. On a smaller, more personal scale, think about the people who've spoken a difficult truth to you, called you to change, or offered you words of consolation and hope, and in so doing opened your eyes to new life, new seeing, new understanding, new faith. They too, were prophets with whom Jesus stood. They too presented Jesus' judgement.

We don't often think or speak of Jesus as a prophet and yet that's exactly how the man who's been given new sight sees Jesus. "He is a prophet" [:17], he tells the Pharisees. Jesus confirms the man's seeing: "'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind'" [:39].

That's what prophets do. They open our eyes to see the reality of what's going on, and cast a vision of what might be. They call us back to our truer selves. Prophets remove the cataracts from our eyes. They offer us clarity and insight. They challenge us to look beyond outward appearances; to look deeper; to see as the Lord sees, and look on the heart of the person or situation. As the Lord said to Samuel, "'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart'" (1 Samuel 16:7).

That's the judgement for which Jesus comes; that we might see the world, one another, and ourselves differently. To see as Jesus sees. The judgement for which Jesus comes into this world is a judgement about our seeing. Today's gospel tells us the man born blind had his eyes opened, with the implication that they'd been closed. But the underlying lesson isn't about physical sight. It's about spiritual seeing. Do we see with eyes opened or do we see with eyes closed? I suggest both.

When we live and see with our eyes closed, we withhold mercy, live in fear, let anger control our lives. When we see with eyes closed, we're unforgiving of ourselves and others. Sometimes we refuse or are unable to see the pain or needs of others. We're too busy to respond, too important to deal with it, too afraid to risk it. At those times, we see with closed eyes. When we love ourselves more than our neighbour, we're seeing with eyes closed, blind to

the value of their life. When violence becomes our default response, we're seeing with closed eyes. We focus on outward appearances and fail to establish an inner connection with the person or situation.

Yet, at other times we recognise the injustice of a situation, we feel our neighbour's pain as our own, we see the needs and life of others as valuable and as important as our own. At those times we're seeing with eyes open. When we offer peace, forgive, act with compassion, we're seeing with eyes open. Our eyes open when the news of another bombing makes us sick to our stomach, when we refuse to participate in the same old agenda-driven conversations, when we reach out to reconcile with someone we've hurt. These are the ways we see with our eyes open. At those times, we're looking beyond outward appearances. We're seeing as God sees, and looking into the heart of the other person or situation.

Jesus didn't say that he came into this world to make judgements, but "for judgement." His judgement isn't a series of individual decisions. Rather, his very life and presence are the judgement:

- His Word is a judgement on our words and the rhetoric of our leaders.
- His compassion is a judgement on our apathy.
- His justice is a judgement on injustice.
- His nonviolence is a judgement on our violence.
- His mercy is a judgement on condemnation.
- His forgiveness is a judgement on guilt.
- His welcome is a judgement on exclusion.
- His hope is a judgement on despair.
- His reign is a judgement on tyranny.
- His seeing is a judgement on our blindness.
- His light is a judgement on darkness.
- His life of prayer is a judgement on our attempts at self-sufficiency.
- His simplicity is a judgement on our cluttered lives.
- His truth is a judgement on deception.
- His wholeheartedness is a judgement on our divided world.
- His self-surrender and crucifixion are a judgement on cosmic evil.
- His resurrection is a judgement on death.

Everything about Jesus, his life, his words, his actions, are a judgement on our lives and world. That judgement offers us the chance to see as he sees, to live as he lives, and to be as he is. His judgement, however, is not an adjudication for the purpose of punishment. Rather, it's a diagnosis for the purpose of healing and life. Jesus always casts his judgement with an eye toward change and transformation. Its purpose is to show us the way, the truth, and the life.

Jesus' judgement isn't a once and forever judgement. It's conditional. It lasts only as long as we see with eyes closed. And there is no one as blind as the one who chooses not to see, who chooses to live and see with eyes closed. Let's not be that way. Let's see with open eyes. Let's see the beauty, the hope, the goodness. Let's see the pain and disfigurement. Let's take it all in, and then, by God's grace, let's work to close the gap between what is and what might be.

Love lies at the heart of Jesus' judgement. With open eyes he sees in us more beauty, more goodness, more holiness, than we accept about ourselves and each other. His judgement is intended to open our eyes to see a new life, a new world, and new possibilities. What we often fail to understand is that his judgement is in our favour and for our good even when it doesn't feel that way. He is a prophet who has come into this world for judgement; for good.

“Surely, we are not blind, are we?” [40]? The Pharisees were blind because they refused to accept Jesus, but we aren't blind, Saints, because though we can't see Jesus standing before us, we know his voice. Jesus is our Good Shepherd; we are his sheep, and we will follow him all the way to the cross because we know and trust his voice (John 10; Ezekiel 34). Then, it will be as John says to his dear friend, Gaius: “I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face” (3 John 1:14). Saints, we will see Jesus face to face in all his radiant glory and live with him forever, because his judgement on our sin is covered by his blood, buried in his tomb, and is “as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12), where God who sees everything will never look again. He sees only Jesus. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.