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Lent 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Given Eyes and Learning to See”
Text: John 9:1-41

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The readings that we heard today are all about seeing. So I would like to consider that a bit today. How we see. How we look at things.

As an adult, I can look at something and see a piece of junk. However, a child may look at the very same thing and see a treasure. And in the same way, there may be something that I, as an adult, see as a treasure, which a child looks at and sees a piece of junk. What’s the difference? Not the thing, but our worldview. Learning and growing up means seeing things from a different perspective.

Another thing about seeing: sometimes it’s easy and sometimes it’s hard. At night, for example, seeing is hard, and though you think you see something, when the light goes on, you realize it wasn’t what you thought at all.

Or think of microscopes and telescopes. Perhaps you look at something and think you can see it and judge it pretty well and have a good idea of what it is, but then when you look at that same thing through a microscope or a telescope, you see something completely different! And you realize it wasn’t what you thought at all.

I guess you could say there is more to seeing than meets the eye. A lot more.

So it was in the Holy Gospel we heard today. There was a lot of seeing going on, but not a few different perspectives.

First there was the man who had been born blind. You could say he saw nothing. But that would be only physically. He *did* see, in a sense. For as seeing is more than meets the eye, he saw the world as a judging and condemning place. A place that thought that either he or his parents had so grievously sinned that his blindness was the punishment of God upon him. And so he was seen by the world as someone who was of little worth. Even after he was given his sight by Jesus, he couldn’t do anything right, he couldn’t say anything right. He was a misfit. An outcast.

There are people seen that way today as well. People who are handicapped, or elderly, are often seen as of little worth. Babies are sometimes seen as treasures, and sometimes seen as junk to gotten rid of. Others people are seen as nuisances, rather than gifts from God.

Then there was Jesus - how was He seen? His disciples called Him Rabbi and confessed Him as the Christ, but they really didn't know what that meant yet. The Pharisees saw Jesus as a rule breaker and a sinner, someone who did not fit their conception of God or the way someone of God should be. They saw Jesus as a threat. Then there was the blind man, who was just *learning* how to see, in every sense of the word! He was physically learning how to see in the world, and he was spiritually learning how to see Jesus.

He reminds me of little Juliana, her first day in this world, being held by her father in the hospital and just staring at him, seeing for the first time; learning how to see .

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*How do people see Jesus today? Some see Him as an example, some as a prophet or great teacher, some confess Him as Christ and yet don't really know what that means. Some see Him as a threat to how they want to live their lives, and some are like the Pharisees - *who saw so much they became blind*. They weren't bad guys, you know, the Pharisees. They were good people who knew their Bibles inside and out. But they so much saw the sin in others that they became blind to the sin in themselves. They stared so long and hard at their own piety that they became blind to the good in others. They knew the words of their Bibles so much that they forgot what those words meant! They had become so blind, in fact, that they couldn't see the fulfillment of all the Scriptures standing right before their faces! *They are a caution to folks like you and me today.**

But most important in the story today are the eyes of Jesus. How did He see others? A bit differently, yes? For He saw not with merely human eyes, but with the eyes of compassion and mercy, ***to do the works of God***. He sees His perfect creation marred and disfigured and in need of restoration. He sees darkened minds which need the light of His truth. He sees outcasts in need of welcome, and the frightened in need of comfort. He sees those who claim to be holy but aren't, but who are in need of repentance. He sees sinners in need of forgiveness. And He sees rightly. His perception is perfect. And to provide what is needed is the work of God He has come to do.

But let us also ask: *How does Jesus see you?* Maybe it is all of the above. For He doesn't see the *you you want* others to see - He sees rightly. So its not the successful you, the strong you, the brave you, the "It's all good" you - how you act for everyone else. He sees rightly and clearly the frightened you, the weak you, the

"I don't know how I'm going to get through this" you, the ashamed you, the sinful you. The you who is just like that man born blind, who everyone else is talking about and judging. The you who others - and maybe even you! - may look at and see junk, but whom Jesus looks at and sees a treasure.

Like the blind man. Nobody else cared about him, except as an object of conversation. But Jesus did. And notice - the man didn't even ask for healing! He was beyond hope. As he told the Pharisees: ***Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.*** I wonder if he even knew what was going on. The day had started like every other day. He was begging by the side of the road. Then this man, who he knew only as ***"the man called Jesus"*** rubs mud on his eyes and tell him to go wash it off. And he is given sight. Physical sight, and then also spiritual sight. By water and the Word of this One who has come to do the works of God.

And again, I am reminded of little Juliana, who started this day like every other day of her young life. She didn't ask Jesus for anything today. She didn't even know what was going on when the Word of God hit her ears and that cold water descended upon her head! But by water and the Word of God, the work of God was done. She received the eyes of faith and the forgiveness of all her sins. And though her vocal chords cannot yet form the words, and her mind does not yet know all the concepts of salvation, faith is more than speech and knowledge. Today, her heart cries out with us: ***"Lord, I believe."*** And shall we doubt that a man who can open the eyes of a man born blind can do this as well?

Yet not just for Juliana, *for you* Jesus has done this as well. For you, too, were born blind - no, even worse! - dead in your trespasses and sins. But the work of God was done in you, too, through water and the Word, to raise you from the death of sin and give you faith and forgiveness, that you may be children of light. Walking by faith. *Fixing your eyes on Jesus* (Gradual).

And seeing Jesus rightly. As Saviour. As Giver. As the One who has ***come to do the works of God*** for you, in you, and through you. And still is.

And again, like the man once blind and like little Juliana, though we can see, yet still we are learning to see. As Juliana, in the first days of her life, stares at all the amazing things her eyes can now see and learns of them, so we too, stare with eyes of faith at the amazing things of God and learn of Him. Staring at the manger, at our God born so little for us. Staring at the cross, at our God who laid down His life for us to atone for our sins. Staring at the empty tomb, at our God who rose for us, breaking the bonds of death and the grave to give us life. We are like Juliana and stare at these amazing things with our eyes of faith, and drink them in. Believing, yet always learning, too, what these things mean for us; of the great love of God for

us.

But something else happened in the hospital. As Juliana stared at her father, her father stared at her, and spoke to her. His voice comforting her and teaching her.

And the voice of our Father, who sees us, does the same. For the voice of God, the Word of God is none other than Jesus Himself, who comforts and teaches us. By His Word He teaches us about what we are seeing of Him, His great love and all that He has done for us. By His Word He teaches us about ourselves and our sin and to repent. By His Word He speaks His absolution, comforting us with the forgiveness of our sins. And by His Word He feeds us - first with the pure spiritual milk of His Word, and then also with the meat of His Body and Blood. That the life He has given be well nourished and grow, healthy and strong in His forgiveness. That the life He has given live forever.

That day in Jerusalem, that work of God was done in that blind man's life. In not too many days from then, that work of God was done for the world, as Jesus ascended the cross to give His life as the Lamb of God, a ransom for the sin of the world. And this morning, that work of God is done here, through water and word and bread and wine. And yet, in Jerusalem, Calvary, and here, these are not different works of God, but one and the same work of God, accomplished by the same God made flesh for us. That we who were blind may see Jesus, and learn to see Him rightly: *as our giving God; our Saviour.*

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.