

Sermon preached at St. John's Episcopal Church, West Hartford, CT
March 22, 2020
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What you see is what you get. Right? Maybe. Or maybe not. That man who looks like the blind beggar can't possibly be the blind beggar – he can see, for heaven's sake. HE'S not blind. Maybe it's just somebody who looks like him.

The Pharisees like everything in good order with no surprises. So when they hear the blind man babbling about mud on his face and washing in the pool of Siloam and being healed, they just can't believe his story. They who have no trouble finding their way around the streets of Jerusalem, they who can read the fine print on the Torah scrolls, turn out to have blindness of the soul. They can't see that a miracle has happened. "Must not be the blind man," they say, "must be a look-a-like." They wonder why God would choose a nobody and not favor respectable, Godly people like themselves. "It can't be," they cry, blinded themselves by their suppositions and their assumptions.

The Pharisees, the religious, faithful people of Jesus' day, are also blinded by their narrow focus on the Law. Their response is logical: If Jesus mixes clay on the Sabbath, he must be a sinner, they conclude, and since a sinner could never create a miracle, that beggar must be telling tales.

"Things are seldom what they seem." The human eye sees a sinful beggar; God sees a person of faith, ready to be healed and be a bearer of Good News. God sees us not only as we are but as we might become. And God wants to open our eyes.

We are always so ready to stereotype people, to put them into boxes according to gender, race, age, nationality, and class. And once we've got people categorized, we don't really have to listen to them because we already know what they are going to say. We don't have to look at them carefully, because we already know who they are. We know all about Republicans: that they'll give tax breaks to the rich. We know all about Democrats: they'll promote government spending and give people a free ride.

I know a man whose brothers called him "Pokey" because he seemed so slow to them, but Pokey became a brilliant inventor with a string of U.S. patents to his name. I'll bet we have all heard of a person who has a heart attack and falls to a city sidewalk but is left there because people assume he is drunk.

We make mistakes like these again and again, whenever we stereotype people and prejudge them without taking the time and care to see them as they really are. One of the extraordinary things about Jesus is the way he sees all kinds of people clearly and appreciates their worth and their potential. He comes across the boisterous fisherman Peter and sees the rock on which to build the Church. He finds Matthew the tax collector and sees a loyal disciple in the making. He meets the questioning Nicodemus and sees a man hungering for God. Jesus encounters a woman at a well and sees a lonely soul desperate to be known and loved. He meets a woman caught in adultery and

sees a person longing for forgiveness and a new life. He is crucified next to a repentant thief and sees in that criminal a citizen-to-be of paradise.

The Good News is that the God Jesus reveals to us is a God who sees US as we really are and sees us through eyes of love, seeing our sins and failings and seeing as well what we might become. There is good in every one of us, even the worst of sinners because God made us, and God doesn't make junk. So celebrate the qualities of your character and personality that are of God – your loyalty, your compassion, your curiosity, your kindness, your perseverance, your wisdom and faithfulness. And if you are wondering if you are truly faithful, just remember you are here, listening to this service and worshipping God.

And then consider what God wants you to become. Yes, God loves us as we are, but *because* God loves us, God always wants us to grow into our full potential. Sometimes this means leaving bad habits behind. Sometimes this means taking up some new project, some fresh course of action that will challenge our old presumptions and require courage and resources we didn't think we had in us.

This is an incredible time in which we are living. Every press conference I hear is dominated by the word “unprecedented.” And that is good as well as bad. Yes, we have fear for our health and for the nation's economy, but we also have new ways of living and looking at things. Barry left a pot of soup on our front step. Linda called to see how we were faring. We are all beginning to think about the community before we think about ourselves.

And in this new world of Covid-19, we have a chance to learn new things and live new patterns. How many of us have yearned for a regular time of prayer, but can't find a way to be regular in the rounds of meetings and events that have filled our lives. And now there's time, time while the coffee brews, time as we begin our work at home, time when we get up or go to bed. Try it! Try setting aside a regular time to say a prayer; try setting aside a time just to be silent.

This is a time when we can help, when we can give, when we are needed. No we are not epidemiologists or nurses, but we all have a role to play. It is interesting to note how often God chooses the least obvious person to do great work. God's glory is shown not in a prince or potentate but in a blind beggar. We do not have to be perfect people for God to choose us. We just have to be willing to say “yes” when we hear God call.

Do you remember what it was like when you were a kid and the time came to choose up sides for a ball game? I remember watching my boys and holding my breath until they were picked. And I remember dancing school and waiting as the boys came across the floor toward the girls. I remember hoping against hope that one of them, any one, would stand before me so I wouldn't get stuck dancing with the teacher.

The Good News is that God chooses us to be on God's team not because we are all that's left but because God needs and wants us. The Good News is that God chooses us to dance because God

sees us as beautiful and graceful and delightful for in God's sight we are all blind beggars miraculously healed and all shepherds called to be kings.