

WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

Our Gospel today on this fourth Sunday of lent is about the clash of beliefs and values.

Let's take a look at what we are taught in the associated readings offered to us, the Hebrew Scriptures, the Psalm and the Epistle, Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

From 1 Samuel, the story of the selection of a KING

We learn that standing still, stuck in old ways is NOT God's way, but moving forward on God's path IS the way ...

"How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out;

And we learn that God sees and discerns value differently than humans do ...

"But 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.

From Psalm 23, we learn

God is in the centre of our lives ... the poet has beautifully aligned "Thou art with me". In the original Hebrew, there are exactly 26 words before "Thou art with me" and 26 words after, nestling "Thou art with me" in the very centre of the exclamation of God caring for us, not from there somewhere, but in the core of our being.

God is with us in our trials and with us when our enemies attack, " You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies"

We are meant to travel through difficulty, not camp in it.

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death."

"Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life"

We move through difficulty, not by will, but by God's grace, and with God's grace, WE MOVE.

From Ephesians

This whole passage tells us about movement to something better. All the way from

"For once you were in darkness, but now in the Lord you are light"

TO the end of the passage ...

"Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

We are reminded to keep moving through trouble.

So, God asks us to move through trials.

God is always with us to help us move through trials.

WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

God sees the heart, so God sees only love;
God judges humanity only by love not by physical appearance and NOT by how well we follow old stagnant laws or lawmakers. God's sees only the creation of love that is always evolving and creating and growing in love. God's love is never settled by a human standard. God's love is always growing with humanity, so is never out of step with humanity's loving growth. The place of God is always in the light where there is growth, not in the dark where growth is strangled.

God does not see deficiency or lack. God **chooses** by seeing the heart, not physical attributes.

In our amazing story today, (thank you AMAZING presenters!) there are two groups of people battling it out.

One group has chosen the way that we are asked to take ... faith, growth, compassion, love, waiting for God's choice to help them move through their dilemma; (the man born blind and Jesus ... interestingly an obvious minority)

The other group has chosen faith in human laws, is very stuck and unable to move out of their 'stuckness', they have chosen judgement by physical standards, and judgement by stagnant laws, and obsession with the power of their earthly authorities. (the Disciples, Pharisees, the parents of the man born blind ... feels like a LOT of people)

And there is an argument ... really there is a trial ... judgement is rampant.

How does this happen? The Disciples have been following Jesus for quite a while ... you'd think they'd be beyond judging someone. The Pharisees are people who are trying to do the right and Godly thing. Jesus has many issues with their thinking, and addresses these issues, but all in all, the Pharisees see themselves as Godly people, dedicated to the upholding of their people, Israel.

But the Disciples accused that either the parents or their newborn son, must have sinned to create the man's blindness. The Disciples have the perspective of those three friends of Job who thought Job MUST have sinned to cause his troubles. They are stuck in a very old story.

They are so stuck that they don't ask Jesus IF someone sinned, they just wonder 'who sinned.'

Then Jesus announces a new thought... "NOBODY SINNED to create this condition. This man is blind "so that God's works might be revealed in him"; so that the Christ, the light of the world, can give him sight.

Why are the Pharisees so upset by the blind man being healed? They asked three time ... "How did this happen? Why are the Pharisees so convinced that either he wasn't really blind or his parents are lying or Jesus just couldn't have done this miracle?"

WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

They are unable to move through their lack of understanding that someone can move through a place of pain and darkness and shame into a new place in their life, where there is light and love and faith. They are unable to move out of their 'stuckness' into a new vision, a new perspective where people are healed; where people can move through pain and condemnation; where people can move through hatred to love.

How did the Pharisees and the Disciples get stuck? How do **we** get stuck in our rigid stances that cause confusion or our stuck in our places of pain and sorrow? How do we get stuck, wallowing in the pity caused by the pain of our personal dilemmas?

We stand wringing our hands, or weeping asking , "Why does God let this happen?" Why does God allow war? Why does allow people to have disabilities that make their lives so difficult? "Those poor disabled people"; those poor homeless people. We judge ourselves and all people as 'less than' for so many reasons.

I believe we create the slide into 'stuckness' by simply asking the wrong questions. We are blinded by **impossibility** when we stand firm on our disbelief and need to 'know' ... how could this have happened; we are blinded to our **judgements** when we beseech 'why did God make this horrible thing happen?"

Perhaps we just need to ask a better question.

Since God is always with us, and God does not judge by outward appearances or conditions, and we seem to want to have a ask SOMETHING and have a say in things, perhaps we need to ask 'What's next?" What will God's love do next and how can I participate in God's loving answer? As the scripture says, "We must work the works of God who sent me while it is day ...".

Then, instead of getting stuck, we move on into the light of God's world.

Then, we just get the hang of moving and getting unstuck when BAM ... we slide back into the trough of our old stuckness.

Our soul would not hesitate to follow our 'God-led' impulse to 'move through' and with God's help, be changed because God sees only, and wants to manifest, the love in our heart. So what happens that, once we see this, we can't seem to stay in this blessed state?

We are opposed. And, like the man born blind, we are threatened with being driven out of our place of love and family ... out of our clan. Driven out into the unknown.

We live on a planet full of US ... full to the brim of people; people who find change uncomfortable; people who like 'how it always was'; people who will oppose us for changing.

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Our friends write in our yearbook, "Don't ever change." Our friends who enjoy gossiping want us in the conversation, our family who needs us to keep that family secret wants us to stay quiet; nobody wants us to leave the status quo for the status quo is then weakened. And we'd be all alone!

Don't listen to those anxious voices, even the ones inside your own head. Listen instead to the Love at the heart of the world who wants your wholeness.

Let yourself be changed, knowing the God is always with us, "Thou art with me, thy rod and staff they comfort me."

As Candace Jones explains in her poem which adorns today's Order of Service and our online presentation ... The Life Season of Darkness

DARKNESS overtakes us
DESPAIR its closest friend
Hopelessness, a destructive foe
Hovers, hovers, awaiting weakness...hopelessness!
Where is trust, partner of faith?
Where is faith, ambassador of love?
Where is love, true promise of hope?
Stumbling now
For lack of light
Gashed, broken, wounded, lost,
Let us fight our way through, though our souls may be tossed,
For a glimmer of light, one ember bright
Can light a torch of hope, with the speed of a flame
Licking and burning yet taking no blame
Until...
The promise of a brighter day.

God desires someone other than who the world sees, God desires that which is manifested in God's image.

When we are driven out, seek Christ. Know that we have seen the Christ, he is speaking with us, and say, "Lord I believe" and worship the Christ of God, moving into the light of a resurrected life ... the promise of a brighter day, Christ shining on us! AMEN