

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Are We Truly Seeing?

Lesson: 1 Samuel 16:1-13 & John 9:1-11

(Slide 1) I have had good eyesight since I was born. When my mother was younger, she also had very good eyesight, and I think I inherited that from her. Of course, as the saying goes, no one can defeat time. Now when she reads books or newspapers, she uses reading glasses.

Because of my good eyesight, I have never had to wear glasses in my life. In fact, when I was in school, I sometimes envied the students who wore glasses. There were even times when I wished I had my own pair of glasses.

At the school I attended, we had regular vision tests. I actually enjoyed those times very much. Starting from the large alphabet letters down to the very tiny numbers, I could read them clearly. And whenever I confidently said what I saw, I felt a sense of pride in myself.

But as I have lived life, I have come to realize something.

Just because we have good eyesight does not mean that we truly see everything.

We may be able to see letters that are far away very clearly. We may be able to recognize people's faces easily.

But that does not mean we can see a person's heart.

I am sure many of you have experienced something like this. Sometimes something looks very good on the outside, but later we discover something completely different. Sometimes someone who did not seem very impressive at first later becomes one of the most precious friends in our lives.

In this way, even though we can see well with our eyes, we often make wrong judgments and wrong discernments in life.

This reminds me of a story I once heard.

(Slide 2) One day, an old man appeared on a street in Switzerland. He was picking something up from the ground and putting it into his pocket. A police officer watched him carefully and suspiciously and asked, "What are you picking up? You know that if you find something, you are supposed to report it to the police."

The old man simply smiled gently and replied, “Oh, it’s nothing important. Please go on your way.”

But the police officer continued to be suspicious and forcefully searched the old man’s pocket.

Inside the pocket were pieces of broken glass.

The old man said to the officer, “Children might step on these pieces of glass and get hurt.”

Feeling ashamed for having suspected him, the officer asked the man who he was.

The old man replied, “I run a small orphanage.”

That old man was none other than Pestalozzi, who is often called the father of modern education.

The lesson this story teaches us is that what we see is not always the complete truth.

The scriptures we read today tell us about the prophet Samuel searching for the king whom God had chosen, and about Jesus healing a man who had been blind from birth.

These stories ask us an important question.

(Slide 3) The question is this: **“Are we truly seeing?”**

Today I would like us to reflect on these scriptures together by focusing on the idea of discernment.

Because Saul, who had been anointed as king by God, did not follow God’s word, God prepared a new king. God sent Samuel to the house of Jesse to anoint the person who would become the new king.

When Samuel arrived at Jesse’s house, he met Jesse’s sons. As soon as Samuel saw the first son, he thought he understood why God had sent him there.

Jesse’s first son was tall and strong. To anyone who looked at him, he seemed perfectly suitable to become king. Samuel probably thought to himself, “This must be the one. This must be why God sent me here to anoint him.”

But God said to Samuel, “People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Samuel was a prophet. Yet even he could not see clearly without God's guidance.

Samuel looked at the second son, the third, and all the way to the seventh son. But God said nothing.

Finally Jesse brought his youngest son, David, who had been out in the fields taking care of the sheep.

David did not look particularly strong. He did not appear old enough. And outwardly there was nothing especially impressive about him.

But God said, "This is the one."

Friends, we look at outward appearances, but God looks at our hearts. In fact, God sees straight through them.

Yet we often forget this. We overlook this truth. Because of that, we sometimes move in the wrong direction and make wrong decisions.

That is why we always need God. That is why we must continually seek God's wisdom and God's will as we discern and make choices in our lives.

I pray that this season of Lent may become that kind of time for all of us.

The story in the Gospel of John may seem like a different story, but the message it carries is surprisingly similar.

(Slide 4) In John chapter 9, Jesus meets a man who had been blind from birth.

This man had never seen the world. He had never seen a beautiful sunset. He had never seen the faces of the people around him.

The fact that he had never seen anything in his life was already a sad reality. But what pushed him even deeper into despair was the reaction of the people around him.

People believed that either he or someone in his family must have committed a great sin, and that God was punishing him. In that way, they justified his suffering.

But Jesus approached this man, put mud on his eyes, and said, "Go and wash in the pool of Siloam."

How could a blind man go to Siloam? Perhaps he slowly made his way there with the help of others around him.

When he arrived, he washed the mud from his eyes.

And suddenly, he could see.

The Bible tells us something interesting about the name Siloam. It means “**Sent.**” Jesus sent the man there. And through that act of obedience, his eyes were opened. But there is an even more surprising part of this story.

The man who had been blind and who obeyed Jesus could now see.

But the people around him, the people who already had sight, could not see what God was doing.

I do not mean that they all became physically blind.

They all saw that the blind man had received his sight. Yet they doubted it. They argued about it. They questioned it. They even became upset because Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath, saying that it was not right.

Friends, this story is not only about physical blindness.

This story is not simply focused on the miracle of a blind man receiving his sight.

This story is about **spiritual blindness.**

What we see in this story is that sometimes the people who believe they can clearly see are actually the ones who are blind, unable to recognize Jesus even when he stands right in front of them.

The story of Samuel anointing David and the story of Jesus healing the blind man both teach us the same truth.

It is this: **we cannot see clearly on our own.**

We cannot truly discern by our own power.

Samuel needed God’s guidance to recognize the true king.

The blind man needed Jesus in order to see.

And the truth is, we are not different from them.

Sometimes we judge people too quickly. We judge people by their outward appearance. We judge people by what clothes they wear, what kind of car they drive, and what kind of house they live in. We judge people simply by their reputation.

But God sees something deeper.

God sees our hearts.

And sometimes we become blind in another way.

By our own strength we cannot see God's work in our lives. By our own strength we cannot see hope in difficult situations. By our own strength we cannot see grace when life feels heavy.

But the good news of the Gospel is this:

Jesus opens our eyes.

Just as Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man, he opens our spiritual eyes.

When we believe in Jesus, follow him, depend on him, and continually ask him for wisdom and discernment, we begin to see differently.

We begin to see people with compassion. We begin to see grace in places where we once saw only problems. We begin to see God at work in places where we never expected.

This is why the season of Lent is so important for us.

Lent is not only about repentance. Lent is also about learning to see again.

We learn to see ourselves honestly. We learn to see others with love. And we learn to see God's presence in our lives.

Friends, the world often tells us to trust our own vision.

But the Bible teaches us something different.

True sight does not come from our own wisdom. True sight comes from the grace of God.

So when we pray, perhaps we can pray like this:

(Slide 5) "Lord, open our eyes.

Open our eyes so that we may see what you see.

Open our eyes so that we may recognize your work.

Open our eyes so that we may follow where you send us."

And when God opens our eyes, we will discover that God has been working right in front of us all along. And we will give thanks and rejoice. Amen.