

Sunday, April 3, 2011
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Sermon

We are in the middle of mud season. It seems that mud is everywhere. The hiking trails are slippery. The walking paths are soggy. The lawns seem saturated. It is seemingly a dismal time of year, however, we know that with just a bit of sunlight and warmth, that mud will produce green grass and beautiful flowers. We know that the mess we see out our window today will turn to a picture of joy in just a few short weeks.

It seems appropriate for mud to abound during the season of Lent. We are in the liturgical time of darkness, waiting, longing for the light of the risen Christ. The metaphor of darkness and light provides us with an opportunity for self-examination.

During Lent we turn inward, taking stock-identifying those areas of darkness in our lives where we might yearn for transformation. In today's passage we get examples of all different types of darkness. The first, of course, is the blind man who lives in a state of darkness. He sits by the side of society, begging for food and attention. The other examples of darkness are perhaps not as stark. We have the disciples' darkness of ignorance in assuming that the man is blind through some fault of his own. Their perspective – that only sinners suffer – allows them to discount this man as unimportant or untouchable. Jesus assures them that the man was not made blind by sin, but has been put on their path to show God's glory. Jesus uses the opportunity to grant sight to this man to demonstrate his divine power.

Imagine if we changed our judgment of people and sought ways to view those who we denigrate as opportunities for exhibiting God's glory.

The neighbors of the blind man give us our next example of darkness. They are unable to believe that he is the same man they knew. They have no context in which to characterize a complete transformation. It is simply unbelievable to them that such a thing could happen because it is outside of their reality.

Have you ever had this experience? Have you ever found yourself not believing someone when they tell you something great that has happened to them?

Often when people want to share a story of experiencing God's presence in their lives with me they will start off by saying, "I know this may sound crazy but..." We tend to rely on the familiar when we are interpreting our lives – we rarely leave ourselves open to mystery and awe.

God, however, is all about mystery and awe. If we cut ourselves off from that possibility – why are we here?

Why gather in this meetinghouse each week to worship God and pray for God's guidance if we are not going to be open to actually feeling God's presence and witnessing God's power. If we are going to pray for miracles, like peace on earth, or food for the hungry or a heart full of love – then we have to believe that there is a possibility that we will get those things.

When we do get them, it is to God we must give glory!

The next example of living in darkness comes in the form of the Pharisees who are so wedded to the rules that they can't see the miracle of Jesus in their midst. I love that they keep asking the blind man the same questions – Who did this? How did this happen? Who is this Jesus? They have all the questions, but they are not prepared for the answers.

In their minds it is impossible that the Son of God would walk among them and choose to heal a beggar man rather than a Pharisee. When they become frustrated with their own lack of understanding they turn on the man who has been healed. If something wonderful has happened and they don't understand it, it must be sinister. This darkness of ignorance plagues our world.

Wars have been fought, since the beginning of time, based on one culture's misunderstanding of another's culture. Rather than being inclined toward understanding differences, we seem to be more likely to dismiss different as wrong. When the formerly blind man tries to explain to the Pharisees why Jesus must be "of God" they drive him out, belittling his ability to teach them anything.

Finally, we hear Jesus use the same words that he used with the Samaritan woman at the well, last week: "Do you believe in the Son of Man." "The one speaking to you is he."

Again, as with the woman at the well, Jesus shares his identity with his new disciple. He enlightens him as to his mission, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see."

The blind man's journey of faith is instructive for us. He starts out by trusting Jesus enough to let him put mud on his eyes. This is not a case of the man calling out asking for help. He was sitting by the road and Jesus happened to see him. Jesus knows what we need and offers it. Next, the man follows Jesus' direction to go wash in the pool of Siloam. Again, he has no idea why – but his trust in Jesus and his desire to be transformed lead him to the pool.

Jesus doesn't always send us where we expect to go, but He sends us where we are meant to go. When the man comes back to the community, he persistently tells the story of Jesus changing him. His neighbors ignore and taunt him, but he continues in his witness of the miracle that has occurred.

We are often hesitant to speak of God's amazing work in our lives but it is in sharing the Good News that we build up the body of Christ in the world.

The man is next faced with the challenge of being interrogated by authorities. He does not shy away from speaking the truth to power. We are called to do the same. There is always a risk involved, but that is part of being a Christian.

The man's next step on his journey is being cast out by the leaders and demeaned as a sinner. Many times, our own faith may put us at odds with other people. We must be willing to take risks in order to maintain our values.

Finally, and this is the hope of all faith journeys, Jesus reveals himself to the man as the Son of God. This encounter with Jesus is the pinnacle of anyone's faith journey. To know that you are in God's presence, even when your neighbors and teachers and possibly even your family, have cast you out is the ultimate reward.

This is the promise of eternal life.

This is what Jesus offers.

At the start of this passage, he said "I am the light of the world."

"I am the light of the world." What promise. What hope. Imagine one person having the capacity to spread light into all the darkness in the world. Imagine one person having the ability to eradicate pain and suffering. Imagine one person filling your soul with light so that your life might be a living example of God's glory.

All you have to do is believe.

The light is there.

All you have to do is come out of the darkness.

Think of yourself as a daffodil bulb living beneath the mud. Imagine yourself striving to reach toward the light. Imagine that you will break through the surface of darkness and emerge into the bright light of day. Imagine that you are beautiful. You are.

Amen