

**Lent, 4th Sunday, Year A-2011**  
**1 Sam 16: 1-13; Eph 5:8-14; John 9: 1-41**  
**Coming to see the work of God**

This week's gospel is the source of a line of the most popular folk hymn in the English language: *Amazing Grace*. You know it:

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

Today's gospel tells of a blind man cured by Jesus. The Pharisees were suspicious that the blind man was a sinner, and Jesus was too for breaking Jewish law by curing on the Sabbath. The hymn quotes the blind man's response to the Pharisee: "If he is a sinner, I do not know. I do know is that I was blind and now I see."

Why do people find *Amazing Grace* touches them deeply? Certainly it is wonderful music. But why do we like a hymn that speaks of wretches being saved? Do we secretly feel that we are really not such good people after all?

The hymn was actually written by a man named John Newton, an 18<sup>th</sup> century British sailor on a ship involved in the slave trade. When a terrible storm battered his ship, he called to God for mercy—the beginning of a conversion that led him to abandon the slave trade and become a minister. It is no accident that his hymn became popular as an African American spiritual and in during the civil

rights movement that sought to replace the blindness of racism with a vision of equal human dignity.

Perhaps the hymn remains popular because we know that there are practices today not so different from slavery and racial discrimination. For example, the US Congress is considering ending support for the WIC program that aids poor women, infants and children in the US, while one in four kids goes to bed hungry at least some of the time. At the same time, corporate profits grew at their fastest rate since 1950 and the incomes of the very wealthy have significantly increased. Do we see this? Or are we are blind to the hunger and poverty around us? Do we need to be given new sight by Jesus?

If we think not, we should remember how Jesus challenges the Pharisees, who thought they could see even when they could not. Jesus judges them strongly for failing to recognize their own spiritual blindness.

Fortunately, the gospel tells us that the movement from blindness to full sight can be gradual. The blind man moves from a saying that Jesus was the “the man” who healed him, to saying that Jesus is a “prophet,” and “one from God,” and finally to a full profession of faith that Jesus is the Son of Man and Lord. Sadly, the Pharisees move in the other direction; they end up in spiritual blindness, rejecting Jesus and working with the Romans to put him to death.

Lent invites us to this gradual coming to sight. We are invited to come to see Jesus as he truly is: a man, a prophet, one sent from God. Our gospel passage also tells us that Jesus healed the blind man so that the “work of God might be made visible through him.” Lent invites us to see the work of God Jesus does in our midst. What is that work of God? It is a work of healing like in today’s story. It is a work of forgiveness, like Jesus extended to the woman caught in adultery a few chapters earlier in John’s gospel. It is feeding the hungry, as Jesus did earlier in John. It is a work of giving new life, as Jesus will do for his friend Lazarus in next week’s gospel. Ultimately it is a work of love—the love that leads Jesus to lay down his life for his friends, as the passion story of Holy Week will show us.

So what did the blind man finally see? He saw that the God he meets in Jesus loves him and us without reservation, even to the point of giving his life for him and for us. Sadly, the religious leaders of Jesus’s time failed to see this. This failure left them in a condition that I wouldn’t hesitate to call wretched. Have we seen this love? If we have, we too can sing “Amazing Grace, That saved a wretch like me. I once was blind, but now I see.” If we see this love, it will give us the vision and energy to work for those hungry, poor and wounded people it is so easy to be blind to in our world. Let’s ask for that amazing grace as we come to the table of the Lord this morning.

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**April 3, 2011**