

# Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today's gospel reading was a long one. It was 42 verses long to be exact. And, because I'm worried that you might be scrolling on Facebook or that you fell asleep. I've got a pop quiz that's fancier than your nodding or raising hands. On your screen, answer this question: How many times did the words sight, see/seen/sees/saw, or blind appear in today's gospel – the options are 4, 11, 14, 23, 29, or 34? Correct answer: 29. And, these 29 times helped to communicate to us that this reading, this story, this encounter with Jesus was all about sight. But, it was more than just sight, in John's gospel, to see is to believe, and to believe in John's gospel is to have abundant life. And in today's story, abundant life meant that a man's existence was utterly transformed.

And that transformation becomes clear in verses eight and nine when the neighbors of this man, those who saw him day in and day out, disagreed about if this was the man. They saw something entirely different about him. There was something new. That man was not the same any more. And, the religious authorities took it one step farther. They questioned the man. They

looked for proof from his parents that he was indeed born blind. For the religious authorities couldn't imagine that what was believed to be a visible sign of the sinfulness of the man's parents could be erased and completely healed. They couldn't imagine a world where the social guilt directed at this family could simply disappear. By a key thing that grabs my attention in this story is that, throughout this entire story, over and over again the disciples, the religious authorities, the man's parents, and even the disciples all focus on the blindness so much so that they completely miss the person.

And, if you're anything like me, I can find myself gravitating towards the why, where, what, how and when in my life that it becomes easy to forget the who. That is, it sometimes comes more natural for us to go to the facts than to the human aspect. We wonder how the infection might impact us and deem the risk acceptable. We fixate on how long our daily life might be impacted. We talk about how the economy is dropping out and the influence that a stay-at-home order will have on it. And in our questioning, it's so easy to forget about real flesh and bone people that are impacted.

We forget about the nurses and doctors who describe working in a "war zone" without protection for themselves and, by extension, their loved ones at

home. So now when Ian comes home from working with COVID-19 patients at the local hospital, he must keep strict distance from his wife and six-week-old daughter. He won't hold his daughter, Lydia. His wife, Annette, will care for their child completely on her own. The human impact is what we often forget.

So too, we forget about those like 41-year-old Gianni whose plea to the world to understand that this is not the flu. He shared the reality that the virus has taken his lungs as he breathes oxygen from a hospital bed. But that pales to what else the virus has taken, for the thing that matters most, his father, is forever gone.

You see, we, like the religious authorities and the disciples, we tend to forget about the real people involved as we rush to gather data, facts, and information.

But, Jesus had an entirely different outlook in today's gospel. When asked by his disciples about how this man could have become blind in verse two, Jesus took a different approach. Instead of talking about the person, he talked to the person. Jesus saw the blind man. Jesus spoke to the blind man. Jesus

gave dignity, life, and healing to a man who was far too often the object of conversation.

So too our God comes to you and sees you fully. Our God notices you not because of the labels that you carry, but God sees you as a person. A person with fears and concerns. A person who is shaped by your experiences. A person who is forever loved. And, our God comes to us in bread and wine at the table of grace, and God comes to us in the waters of baptism that remind us that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

And, that is why we will take an interesting form of communion today and throughout this pandemic. Because, even in this time, our God does not abandon us. And, as I've said so many times before, we know that when the world is falling apart and we struggle to see God's presence, we have complete, absolute, and certainty that God is present in the sacraments of baptism and communion. So, at this time when it seems to get more difficult to see God's presence among us, it is our God (and not me) that shows us. Our God comes to us just like that blind man and acknowledges who we are—a beloved child of God that can never be separated from God's love.

So, for the time being with you being there and me being here, we will work to respond to God's love by sharing God's love. We will work to do our part for the health and wellbeing of another. We will gather together to partake in a meal where we, collectively at this moment, know that God is present.

And in the midst of God's presence among us, I wonder how we can better come to recognize it in unexpected places. What are the ways we can see God anew? What are the ways we can be open to the things that have always been sitting right in front of us?

Much like God did not cause the man to be blind, so too, this virus was not God's wish. Yet, at the same time, God works through the least likely of things to open our eyes to God's presence. So maybe as some of us spend more time at home we'll get to see our family members in a new light? Maybe we'll get to have coffee or drinks by video chat. Maybe we'll become closer with siblings, friends, and neighbors as we call to check on them. Maybe we'll grow to appreciate the first responders and the grocery clerk, the public transit driver, and the delivery person more than ever before as they risk their lives to keep us alive. Maybe through this all we have an opportunity to see what we've become blind to noticing.

So, friends, this gospel may have been one from a long time ago but it's not from a far-off distant place. This is a story about you and me. A story where we are reminded that we are more than a number and a statistic, but rather we are a person who is loved so very deeply by our God. Our God who is ever present in our homes, in our hospitals, and in our lives. So, as we journey together in this Lenten wilderness, living in the wilderness from our church building, I pray that we notice God's love. I hope that we discover God's presence in those common places. And, I pray that you find God's love right there in your midst each and every day. Amen.