

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Associate Rector

Scripture: John 9:1-13, 28-38

"The Light of the World"

Today's Holy Gospel is all about "seeing." Have you ever walked into a room that was totally dark? I guess you might call it pitch black! You cannot see a thing and it takes a while for your eyes to adjust – for your pupils to open wider and let more of whatever light there is in. If you wake up in the middle of the night in a hotel room and need to visit the rest room – the light creeping in under the door from the hallway is a welcomed guest – right? Darkness is the absence of light – and when light is allowed into the equation you can see so much more and your comfort level rises significantly. Have you ever heard someone tell you they were afraid of the light? Having light in a darkened situation – no matter how small that light is – reveals a safe path, shows us obstacles to avoid and allows us to function.

When Jesus was asked by the Pharisees who was responsible for the blindness of the man in today's Gospel – He simply responded "*It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.*" (John 9:3-5) Jesus was referring to the lack of light in this man's life being used to demonstrate that when light is introduced – there is a complete and total change – a transformation. Jesus states emphatically that He is that light.

This is not the first time that Jesus referred to light. In John chapter 8, Jesus tells that woman who was caught in adultery to "go and sin no more" and then Jesus told the Pharisees "*I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.*" (John 8:12) This woman was living in sin, in the darkness of separation from God – and Jesus lovingly told her that He did not condemn her – but that her behavior needed an "extreme makeover!"

Speaking of needing an extreme makeover – what about the Pharisees and the blind man? There is a lot going on with them in today's Gospel –

- A man who has been blind since birth gets to see for the very first time
- The Pharisees, who are about to accuse Jesus of healing on the Sabbath – first go after the blind man, his parents, and anyone else who they pin his blindness on – as a sinner.
- Jesus proclaims that He is the Light of the World.
- They can't find a sinner to blame so they call Jesus a sinner!
- The Pharisees don't want to hear the good things that the formerly blind man has to say about Jesus – and they throw him out.
- In response to Jesus' question if the man believes in the Son of Man – the formerly blind man says "*Who is he, Lord, that I might believe in him?*"
- Jesus responds "*You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.*"

Don't you find it ironic that a man who was born unable to see is the one who sees more clearly than the Pharisees? Let me put it to you this way – this man was born in darkness – not sin, but real permanent darkness. Then Jesus explained that this man was born that way so that God could use him to display His mercy and love – and His eternal healing power over spiritual blindness.

Spiritual blindness is the real sin, not physical blindness. Jesus has given sight to a man born physically blind, but this is a sign of the more significant spiritual light that Jesus provides for those who are spiritually blind and unless we let Him open the eyes of our heart – as a real coming to faith – the darkness reigns. The Apostle Paul prays for the Ephesians in their struggle against spiritual blindness: *"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."* (Ephesians 1:18-19)

In Jesus' healing of the man's eyes – we see the One who created everything – with just a word. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good"* (Genesis 1:2-4) In the very beginning of John's Gospel – we look at the creation story through different eyes – remember I told you it was all about seeing? Listen to these words and see what your heart tells you. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, **and the life was the Light of men.** The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, **to testify about the Light,** so that all might believe through him. **He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.** He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him."* (John 1:1-11)

Here was the long awaited Messiah standing right in front of the leaders of the Temple and they didn't have the eyes to see Him, but instead, they were more concerned about a man being healed on the Sabbath and the legalist breaking of the Law. Jesus, the Light of the World was right in front of them waiting for them to get it – but these guys couldn't hit water if they fell out of boat! Jesus tries to give them a huge hint – by telling them that He is the light that can make them see – after all light reveals the truth that is right in front of you – doesn't it? There are a lot of people who might be afraid of what the light would reveal in their lives. In fact Jesus told Nicodemus that very same thing – right after He told him about

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God sending His Son so that whoever believed in Him would have eternal life. Jesus told him: *"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."* (John 3:19-21) People are so afraid of the punishment for their deeds and the threat that others might find out – that they don't remember God's promise of salvation and forgiveness of sins – through the cross. Let Jesus, replace the darkness and sin in your heart with the light of His love – that darkness cannot exist in the light – it is a physical impossibility! Give it to Him today – let Him take your sadness, your fear, your pain – your worry, your depression – let Jesus fill you with His light.

I must ask you this question: How strong is your relationship with Jesus – how clearly do you see the light of His love in your life?

- Is it like a pencil flashlight that you can see but just barely; you love Him – but you really don't trust Him enough to give Him your sins? (hold up small light)
- Or is it like a medium sized flashlight that shines pretty nicely – but only goes so far? You give Him some – but not all. (hold up medium flashlight)
- Is the Light of Jesus a bright shining beacon that others can see – and it gets brighter and brighter the more you trust in Him, out your faith in Him, confide in Him and repent to Him? (hold up LED bar light)

In Matthew 5:14-16 Jesus said *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; "nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."*

Jesus encourages you today, to see Him as the Light. He encourages you to put away spiritual blindness and like the blind man – truly see Jesus.

A unique and very personal part of ministry is being with people as their vision becomes more clear – as they see God working in their life. Our dear brother, Ned Wood was like that. Ned went home to be with the Lord on Tuesday morning. As you know – he fought a valiant fight against cancer – and the Lord called Him home, to be in glory with Him.

The painting that you see displayed here in the church today is Ned's final gift to his parish family. Shortly after we moved into this building in December 2008, my wife, Marilyn, asked Ned to paint a mural for the wall upstairs – to cover a mural that was of Disney characters. Ned was given the cover of a children's Bible – that only took up the center area of what would become this painting. Ned was given eyes to see more than most of us. He extended the image and included a heavenly

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scene with rivers, fields and trees. Remember I said it is all about seeing? This painting will be framed and hung in the hallway – to ever be a reminder of our brother Ned and the many gifts that he shared with us during his 16 years as sexton of St. Bartholomew's. Isn't it remarkable that Ned, like the blind man, was used by the Lord so that "*works of God might be displayed in him?*"

We celebrated Ned's life yesterday morning with a wonderful service – most of which Ned requested and helped design. During that service, with the permission of his family, I had the opportunity to share Ned's last moments with those present. It is an awesome witness to the growth and love in the faith in which Ned grew. When I got to Ned's room at Hospice, I sat down by his bedside, looked Ned right in the eyes and reminded him of our conversations that when Jesus comes and reaches out His hand – that he had our permission to take it and go. I no sooner finished those words when Ned's glance moved from my eyes to just over my right shoulder. His eyes grew big and his face became one of joy and what I can only describe as adoration – I knew that He saw Jesus – the Light of the World – who had come to take him home. In a few moments during the prayers and anointing, Ned had gone with Jesus.

It's all about seeing; seeing and recognizing Jesus – the Light of the World.