

EYES WIDE SHUT

A SERMON FOR LENT  
MARCH 30, 2014  
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
MARIANNA, FLORIDA  
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JOHN 9:1-41

You would think that after forty five years of preaching, I'd done just about everything possible from the pulpit. I thought I had. But as I looked at these long lessons for Lent, it occurred to me that I hadn't. I usually cut the lessons down to a manageable size, and then preach on that shorter text, telling the story told in the gospel in an abbreviated fashion.

So this year, I decided to read the whole long passage, and then preach a one page sermon on it. Who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks?

By the way, the title of this sermon is borrowed from one of the worst motion pictures ever made, but it is an apt description of what we see in the gospel lesson for today. The Pharisees have their eyes shut so tight that they not only cannot see the truth, they cannot hear the testimony of a man who has experienced a miracle. And they drive him out of the synagogue, out of the place where God's chosen people come together to learn of God. They are so blind that they cannot learn a new lesson, nor stand the sight of one who could teach them about God's ways.

John quotes Jesus as saying that He came into this world for judgment. That seems to contradict what most of us believe, which is that Jesus came into the world so that we might escape the judgment which we so rightly deserve for our sins. But Jesus seems to be saying here that sin doesn't matter. This man wasn't blind because he sinned, or because his parents sinned. He was blind so that the mighty works of God might be displayed, through a humble little miracle of spit and mud and washing in the pool of Siloam.

The judgment is in the one whose eyes are opened. To paraphrase old Willie Barclay, whenever we come face to face with Jesus, we pass judgment upon ourselves. If we see in Jesus nothing to desire, nothing to admire, nothing to love, then we condemn ourselves. If we see in Jesus something at which to wonder, something to which we must respond, something that reaches out to us and that we must reach out towards, then we are on the right path. When we are conscious of our own blindness and when we long to see better and to know more, then our eyes can be opened and we can be led more and more deeply into the truth.

If we see Jesus and want to follow Him, if we see Jesus and want to emulate Him, then our eyes are open.

When we think we know it all, when we do not realize what we cannot see, we are truly blind and we are beyond hope and help. Only they who realize their own weakness can become strong. Only they who realize their own blindness can learn to see. Only when we realize our own sin can we be forgiven.

The more knowledge we have, the more we are to be condemned if we do not recognize the truth when we see it. "If the Pharisees had been brought up in ignorance, then they could not have been condemned. Their condemnation lay in the fact that they knew so much, and they claimed to see so well, and yet they failed to recognize God's Son when He came." Barclay, *The Gospel of John, vol.2, page 58.*

In this world in which we live, in this nation in which we live, there are those who are brought up in ignorance, who have never heard about Jesus. There is no condemnation for them. But for those who have heard the word, who have seen the light, who have read the stories, and have turned their backs, closed their eyes, hardened their hearts, there is judgment. But the point is, like the Pharisees, they have brought the judgment upon themselves.

May we see, and believe. May we have our eyes opened, and our hearts set free, through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to whom be the glory, the power, the dominion and the praise, in the church and in the world, now and forever more. Amen.