

1 Samuel 16:1-13

¹The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ²Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'" ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." ⁴Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the LORD." ⁷But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." ⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ⁹Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ¹⁰Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." ¹¹Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." ¹²He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." ¹³Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

John 9:1-41

¹As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹²They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." ¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for

the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." ²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."

³⁷Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

³⁹Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Second Sight

The gift of sight is so important, isn't it? So many people love movies, and what would a movie be if you did not have the gift of sight? We say that "a picture is worth a thousand words." When someone describes an event or a phenomena, we "see" it in our minds, and if we describe something unusual we've seen, say for example a UFO, we try to describe it in terms that people recognized; "It looked like a saucer." And that is how our imaginations picture it. When police are working on solving a crime, they first look for "eye" witnesses, people who saw an event. And how often have we been told by some excited individual, "You should have seen it!"

But as the Children's sermon was meant to illustrate, **seeing can be considered much more than "looking at" any object or event, we "look into" them – we intuit (the word literally means "look into.")** We apply our intuition in our attempt to somehow comprehend that image that falls on our retina. When a distraught child sees her mother's face, she feels relief because she associates that image with relief, with salvation if you will – "Mommy is going to make everything better." Conversely when a new army recruit sees his drill sergeant, his entire body will become tense as he associates the drill sergeant with certain anguish. Without us even being aware of what's happening, our minds interpret nearly everything we see.

As adults who were born with the gift of sight, it's hard for us to remember what it was like to see things for the first time. I imagine for young Julian that everything is fantastic – colors, shapes, movement experienced by a mind that has not yet grasped the meaning of anything. We are far too old to go back and erase our layers of understanding, and anything new that we see is interpreted based upon our vast reservoir of experience and knowledge. But if we could go back to those moments when everything was new, I believe that **our earliest intuition must have been a belief in God.** Because our first realization, our first *understanding* of the world that we see must have been that there was a Creator, that all this wonderful stuff that we're seeing came from somewhere and thus we could connect it to God, and our first expression of amazement over the beauty of the creation would be the purest and

simplest form of worship imaginable. I recall when my son **James** was probably less than a year old, and I used to carry him on my back in his little harness, and I would go hiking up this wonderful mountain that was right across the street from our home. James often fell asleep on Daddy's back, as he did one morning as I was hiking with a friend up the mountain, and we stopped about halfway up at a beautiful overlook where we could see our town far below. James just happened to wake up at this overlook, and he let out the longest sigh I'd ever heard as he looked down from this overlook. I now wonder if that was not pure worship, and if he was more articulate if he might not have said, "the LORD, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth!" (Psalm 47:2).

And our comprehension of creation should not have diminished our zeal to worship God; as we grow up and learn that rainbows are caused by the refraction of light passing through mist, we can still be amazed by the whole phenomenon. To discover that, based on the latest discoveries of astrophysics, the universe is nearly fourteen billion years old should not disappoint us or make God seem somehow farther away from us – perhaps he's a bit older than we thought. Research into the origins of the universe should excite us as we see God as a much more awesome being than we could even imagine, yet when we consider what the human brain is capable for imagining and realizing, we find even more reason to praise the Creator of all of this. **Scientists contemplate the physical universe and to con-temple literally means to come to the temple,** to enter the realm of the holy. As our minds delve into creation, we delve into God's domain, into holy territory, and the greater our knowledge, the more reason we have to worship this creator God.

So what went wrong? How has it come about that so many people have lost any desire to worship God? What has blinded us from making the connection between God and creation, and what sapped our enthusiasm? What has numbed us? The essential truth is found in the first book of the Bible; Humanity, instead of celebrating the beauty of everything that God had created, instead started thinking that we were God. We dismissed the true God. In raising ourselves up to the status of God, we even began to believe that we could disprove God – truth be told all the scientists in the world can neither prove nor disprove God, because God is Spirit and cannot lend himself to scientific observation, but because we wish to occupy that throne, we strive to disprove our own Creator. If our will is to be like God, we certainly don't want to acknowledge anything greater than ourselves.

And when **we believe ourselves to be God, we believe that all things are meant to be for our glory and not God's.** We no longer see things as testimony of God's goodness but as objects intended to satisfy ourselves. We value things according to how much pleasure they bring to us, and we surround ourselves with the things that bring us pleasure. Even the people who are closest to us occupy their positions because of the pleasure we draw from them. The greatest challenge to a marriage is time, because as our spouses grow older they no longer possess the outward beauty that we value so highly, and our physical desire for them diminishes – and among our greatest fears is the possibility that we will no longer be physically attractive to our spouse. What we need is a change of heart that enables us to look at ourselves and others in a new light, to see beyond outward appearances, and to see all creation as something that is intended to bring glory to God, not to us. We need second sight.

Such second sight was the topic of both our Old and New Testament lessons today. In the Old Testament lesson we find the prophet Samuel looking for a new king. The current king, Saul, has the appearance of a king – big and strong – but his heart is not in the right place, and the heart is what God is looking at. God saw something in David that was missing in Saul – an interest in serving God. David was not without sin; he would raise himself to the level of God and lust for a woman and use his power to "acquire" her, then order the death of her husband.

Yet I suppose he was far better than the alternative, Saul. Despite David's flaws, God could see beyond outward appearance, someone who would be good for the people.

The passage we read from John's gospel is the other side of the coin; it's not about God seeing into the human heart as it is about *humanity* seeing into the heart of God.

We have the irony of a man born blind gaining both physical and spiritual vision while the leaders of the Temple, who are supposedly the spiritual giants of the day and who see evidence of God's power and glory, deny God's involvement in the healing of this man and God's presence in the person of Jesus. The man who is born blind, in the course of thirty-eight verses, progresses in his understanding of Jesus' identity, first as a man, then as a prophet, and finally as God himself in the flesh. The temple leaders, who through the years have been seduced by the splendor of the temple and all the perks that came from being a religious authority – the power and the wealth, cannot bring themselves to believe that God would bypass them in order to heal a blind man. They had assigned themselves righteousness because of their positions while the blind, the lame, and the lepers were, according to the temple leaders, sinners by virtue of their disability or illness. This served as a convenient excuse for the righteous leaders to ignore those who were sick and disabled, because by their way of thinking God was doing what was right by making them sick and disabled. It became a convenient argument to defend their own positions – I'm healthy and wealthy because God has judged me deserving of such blessings, while the sick and the lame are getting what they deserve. But what happens when one who is blind is cured, and begins testifying that someone without priestly authority made it happen? The man who is healed sees his healing as an act of God while the leaders of the temple see it as a breach in protocol that threatens *their* authority to forgive sins and to determine when and under what conditions such forgiveness should occur. Jesus, in the self-righteous minds of the temple authorities, must be doing the work of the devil. Yet the man who was born blind comes to see first the true nature of God, as one who not only wishes to heal the sick and forgive the sinner and second he comes to see that Jesus himself is the embodiment of God.

The take home is twofold. First, take to heart this true nature of God, as one who longs to heal and forgive, to lift you up and make you whole. Second, recognize those things in your life that you use to glorify yourself and start seeing them as instruments that can glorify God. When you see that God has so generously provides us with everything we need we can start to glorify him through those things and through ourselves.