

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As many of you know, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor in my early forties. The surgery to remove the tumor would be quite extensive, and the surgeon and his PA spared me no details of the possible negative outcomes up to and including death. In my particular case, the tumor had grown around the spot where the optic nerves cross behind the eyes, which meant that those delicate nerve pathways were completely encased, and should the surgeon fail to perform the surgery with absolute precision, I would lose sight in one or both eyes.

I recall that the possibility of dying during the procedure didn't frighten me very much; I trusted Jesus' promise of resurrection, and that gave me hope. What scared me – absolutely terrified me, actually – was the thought of waking from the surgery blind. The helplessness, limitation and dependence – things I associated with being blind – would bring upon my life were not things I thought I could endure. The humiliation of regularly having to depend upon others every day petrified me because up until that point in my life, I lived in the arrogant delusion that I was in control of my life – a state that afflicts western first world people most severely.

Having to place my life and my sight completely in the hands of that surgeon, to trust that God would be with me no matter what happened relieved me of that delusion. Reduced to helpless dependence, I discovered a kind of gratitude I'd never really considered – the gratitude that someone else was so much more capable than me held the scalpel and the matter was completely out of my hands.

We find ourselves in precisely this place as we have been consigned to our homes, socially distancing ourselves from one another because of the very real threat of the corona virus. It has brought a moment of helplessness and humility upon all of humanity on every continent and in nearly every nation. Science, which we have come to associate with human ascendancy and mastery – provides us with no more effective solution than washing our hands frequently and staying away from other people. That's the best we can do, and even this course of action will only slow the spread of this deadly virus.

As it turns out, the only solution to the peril in which the world finds itself relies entirely on individual humility to comply, not with a solution or cure, but with the best course of action – quarantining ourselves from each other. Perhaps the most sobering thought of all is that the power to influence outcome of this moment lay not in my hands, but in everyone else's; we must depend upon the willingness of others to make sacrifice in their own lives for the sake of everyone else. I can do my part, but my part alone doesn't change anything.

When the best we can hope for is that stopping life as we know it for a couple of months will slow the spread of infection and reduce the number of COVID-19 deaths, we must reckon with the truth that our modern delusion of mastery is a false hope. We are not in control, and we never have been. This is a sobering moment for a world that has come to believe that we are the masters of our own destinies, while living with a false sense of certainty where we think we are in control. Perhaps, as my mother told me this week, saying, *“God is speaking to all of us in this moment, saying, ‘Life’s not all about me – it never has been – it’s about*

carving enough to do what is best for others, and in the end that is best for me too.” Perhaps this moment will break through and cure us of the blindness that threatens not just lives but the future of the world itself.

Our gospel this morning presents a very similar theme. Jesus restores sight to a man born blind who comes to see not just with his eyes but with his very being, while those who think they see stumble around blindly, miss God’s presence because they are so intent on maintaining their own presumption of supremacy, mastery, and superior understanding.

John, the gospel writer is masterful. *The story mocks everyone who believes they know how things should be, who feel as though they are in control, whose arrogance prevents them from seeing how insignificant we really are.* A, uneducated blind beggar – about the lowest person on the social totem pole – understands, while those who presume to know, who think they understand, who hold the notion of how things really are to be – all look like fools.

The Pharisees judge Jesus’ lack of conformity to the customary observance of the Sabbath as disqualification that He is the One who knows. Yet He is the One who has the power of God. *The question ringing through this text is: **Who is really blind? Who really sees?***

The answer appears to be that those who humble themselves, and in humility accept that Jesus has the power of God truly see, while those who cling to their arrogance and worldly mastery are blind fools.

The gospel writer John wants us to understand that *a dead Jesus on the cross has far more control over the world than any of us on our best day.* His voice called everything into existence, and will ring forth at the

end of time. Jesus doesn't come to tell us that there is a better way; someone always has a better way. *Jesus comes to tell us that there is just one way to life – following Him* – humbly forsaking our own foolish notions that we know best, and treating everyone as though they matter more than we do, just as He does. *It's not an easy way, and it requires that we check all our accomplishment and arrogance and certainty and entitlement and selfishness at the door,* and simply follow Him in living the life that really leads to life – a life lived for the sake of the world.

In these grave times we can perhaps begin to practice the humility of the man born blind who upon being healed submits to Jesus. So, wash your hands regularly, keep your distance, care gently for the people in your homes, reach out to those whom are alone, do what must be done for the good of all, and know that even though perhaps we don't can't fix this problem, we can do our part to make it better for everyone else.

Fifteen years ago as I contemplated the possible outcome of my impending surgery, *I was convinced that there could be nothing worse than being blind, but I was wrong. Being an arrogant fool is far worse than being blind* – even born blind.

As it turns out, Jesus is able to help the man born blind by healing him and restore his sight so that he can see the world as it is. But it seems that Jesus can do nothing for the ones who think themselves in the place of God, believing that they, more than others, really see how it should be.

I suppose it's the burden of having our eyes opened when we ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It blinds us,

convincing us that we are better, know better than others, when in fact there is only One who knows and sees things as they truly are, and He did not choose to Lord that over others but died in humility that other might live and see the Way to Life.

Return to the Lord your God. For God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Amen !!!