

Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from March 2, 2008

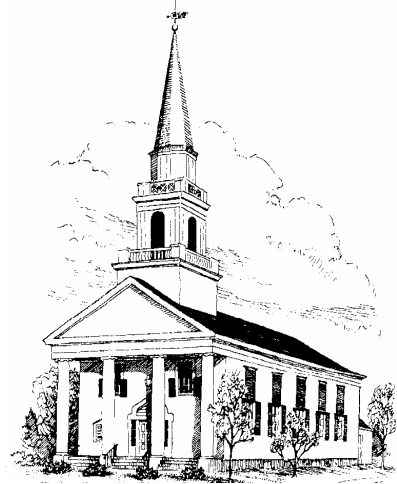
Rev. Barbara J. Libby

“Seeing the Light”

Scriptures:

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41



Here we are at the fourth Sunday of Lent already! And we continue our series of close encounters with Jesus. Our focus in worship during these Sundays of Lent this year have all been pretty basic, even primordial. We are not dealing with theological abstractions here. We are confronted with the most elemental dimensions of life and experience.

Three weeks ago, we saw the close encounter of the devil with Jesus, tempting him to use his power and authority to satisfy very human desire. Jesus was shown to be strong enough to withstand all manner of temptation. Two weeks ago, we saw Jesus meeting at night with a Jewish leader, Nicodemus, who wanted to find out who Jesus really was. His encounter with Jesus brought him to new faith. Last week, we saw an encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well where she heard about God as "living water". That encounter with Jesus brought her to new faith.

Today we hear about an encounter of Jesus with a man born blind. Of course this story is about more than a sight-giving miracle. This story is also about the conflict between those in power who are so tied into their own dogma that they can't believe their own experience or the experience of anyone else with social credibility different from theirs.

The man born blind in today's story seems a bit like a rubber ball, doesn't he? Bounced from Jesus to the Pharisees, then bounced to his parents, and finally bounced right out of the village. And Jesus, saddened by what happened to the man, seeks him out, and his conversation is overheard by the Pharisees. "Are you trying to tell us we're the ones who are blind?" the Pharisees ask. "Bingo!" says Jesus.

John's Gospel throughout this Lent invites us quite simply into "encounters" with our needs—our own problem with temptation, our own need for rebirth, our own thirst for living water. And today our own need for clear sight, for vision, for insight and, yes, even our own need for the light of the world in our lives and our church.

Someone has suggested that "as a folk healer, Jesus restored meaning to people's lives." (*John J. Pilch from Jesus As Healer*) I resonate with that remark that Jesus restored meaning to people's lives. I know that I am hungry for meaning in my life. I believe we are all hungry and thirsty for meaning in our lives.

I don't know about you but I've had quite enough winter this year! I cannot wait for the first official day of spring—several weeks off yet, actually during Holy Week this year—when the daylight

finally begins to be longer than the nighttime. I'm ready for more light-filled days. I'm ready for warmer days. I'm ready for longer days. I'm ready for shorter nights! I'm more than ready for the snow and the cold to just go away and the first green shoots to start poking their heads up through the ground. I can't wait for the first snowdrops to bloom, the crocuses and the hyacinths to emerge. I yearn for more sunlight! Are you ready as well for seeing more light in your life?

Most of us are aware of what's called *seasonal affective disorder* whose acronym S.A.D. aptly names what happens to many of us in these long and darker days of winter. Studies have shown that people living in Alaska have a much higher incidence of depression during the winter months than the rest of the residents of the United States. We all know that Alaskans are not the only persons affected by the short days. We all need light!

We all know of the darkness of our world. We cannot fail to see the darkness and evil of this world. There may be some darkness in your life that threatens to overwhelm you. There is all too much darkness in this country and around the world.

One writer reflects (*Fred Buechner, The Holy Dream, p. 49-50*):

"God knows we are a people who walk in darkness ... if darkness is meant to suggest a world where nobody can see very well—either themselves, or each other, or where they are heading, or even where they are standing at the moment; if darkness is meant to convey a sense of uncertainty, of being lost, of being afraid then we live in a world that knows much about darkness."

Mystic Congregational Church is perceived by some as a church in a time of darkness. We must continue to look at that carefully, to acknowledge the hurt and broken places here, to accept the places this church is less than perfect, and to open ourselves to God's vision so we can move ahead into the light.

There are those among us who have a vision for where this church might go as it moves into the future. There are those who want to help this church move ahead with new awareness and insight. Come to next Sunday's gathering at 11:15 a.m. to hear the report of the UCC Task Force and come to hear your Moderator's thoughts and ideas about how this church might come together and move ahead. We need to learn to trust one another again. We must learn to trust the role of the pastor again and God will bring us all into full light and fuller sight!

"The Pharisees who may have had 20/20 vision can't see the truth. Jesus is the truth, in the flesh, and they were blind to it. But in the end the man born blind sees clearly. He cannot only see Jesus, but he can see that Jesus is the Messiah. He had 20/20 spiritual vision." (Lindy Black from an online reflection)

This church needs to examine its spiritual vision. We all need help with our blindness. Amen.

John 9:1-41

From a translation called The Message by Eugene H. Peterson

Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?" Jesus said, "You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world's Light."

He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man's eyes, and said, "Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam" (Siloam means "Sent"). The man went and washed—and saw.

Soon the town was buzzing. His relatives and those who year after year had seen him as a blind man begging were saying, "Why, isn't this the man we knew, who sat here and begged?"

Others said, "It's him all right!"

But others objected, "It's not the same man at all. It just looks like him."

He said, "It's me, the very one."

They said, "How did your eyes get opened?"

"A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' I did what he said. When I washed, I saw."

"So where is he?"

"I don't know."

They marched the man to the Pharisees. This day when Jesus made the paste and healed his blindness was the Sabbath. The Pharisees grilled him again on how he had come to see. He said, "He put a clay paste on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "Obviously, this man can't be from God. He doesn't keep the Sabbath."

Others countered, "How can a bad man do miraculous, God-revealing things like this?" There was a split in their ranks.

They came back at the blind man, "You're the expert. He opened your eyes. What do you say about him?"

He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews didn't believe it, didn't believe the man was blind to begin with. So they called the parents of the man now bright-eyed with sight. They asked them, "Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? So how is it that he now sees?" His parents said, "We know he is our son, and we know he

was born blind. But we don't know how he came to see—haven't a clue about who opened his eyes. Why don't you ask him? He's a grown man and can speak for himself." (His parents were talking like this because they were intimidated by the Jewish leaders, who had already decided that anyone who took a stand that this was the Messiah would be kicked out of the meeting place. That's why his parents said, "Ask him. He's a grown man.")

They called the man back a second time—the man who had been blind—and told him, "Give credit to God. We know this man is an impostor."

He replied, "I know nothing about that one way or the other. But I know one thing for sure: I was blind . . . I now see."

They said, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

"I've told you over and over and you haven't listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you so eager to become his disciples?"

With that they jumped all over him. "You might be a disciple of that man, but we're disciples of Moses. We know for sure that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man even comes from."

The man replied, "This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes! It's well known that God isn't at the beck and call of sinners, but listens carefully to anyone who lives in reverence and does his will. That someone opened the eyes of a man born blind has never been heard of—ever. If this man didn't come from God, he wouldn't be able to do anything."

They said, "You're nothing but dirt! How dare you take that tone with us!" Then they threw him out in the street.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him. He asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

The man said, "Point him out to me, sir, so that I can believe in him."

Jesus said, "You're looking right at him. Don't you recognize my voice?"

"Master, I believe," the man said, and worshiped him.

Jesus then said, "I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind."

Some Pharisees overheard him and said, "Does that mean you're calling us blind?"

Jesus said, "If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you're accountable for every fault and failure."