

With New Eyes
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So this world. Wow. It's a crazy place.

Guess that's like saying sunlight is bright... kinda obvious.

But it's true. World's a messy, confusing, stressful, beautiful, breath-taking, place.

All at once each one of these things is true, and we're left standing in the middle of it all,

Doing our best to sort things out,

and avoid doing anything that might make it any worse than it already is.

And as things become more amazing---with our recent technological changes, I mean---

--they also become more mind-muddling, right?

(Not because these touch screens are tough to use---

---they kind of make these things as easy to navigate as possible,

using as little *thought* as possible)

But what I mean is, with more *ease* in communicating,

things have become more *complicated* in the ways we *relate* to each other.

Strangely, we just don't communicate too well

in all of these thousands of ways we have of sharing with each other, now.

Because our texts, and our e-mails, and our phone calls, and our facebook posts,

and our twitter feeds, are all sitting mashed together in our pocket, now,

It's kinda easy for our words to get lost in the clutter.

You're in the middle of typing about this stand-up comic
you're about to post that no one will click on,
And your e-mail chime goes off about three or four times.
You don't even hear it anymore, it goes off so often between junk mail from Travelocity
and the coupons you keep getting from Sharper Image for whatever reason....
And the message from your brother about how
he's changing his e-mail address for the fourth time
gets pushed to the bottom, past your screen's population capacity.

Between this, a text message alert comes in from your mom
which you don't have time to deal with,
b/c you've got to go harvest your crops on Cletus' farm.
You finally hit post on that comedy clip no one will ever see,
and a message bubble pops up from a friend apologizing
for only now responding to your text from yesterday
which you don't even remember sending.

...All of these ways of communicating all just sort of
colliding into each other in a big, messed up glob of too much,
---too much to see all at once---so each one sort of just falls to the wayside. Lost in the
clamor.

And with all of this freedom to show people
things we're interested in at any given time---pictures, songs, videos---

In all of this *seeing* and *showing*,
we've kinda somehow become more *blind* to each other, haven't we?
All of this self-expression lost in those mounds of other self-expression,
and we find our thumbs just slipping past all of these personal and intimate thoughts
while we think of different ways we can again express *ourselves*.

And the worst, to *me*, is this anonymity we feel while in conversation with each other
through all of these different threads on facebook,
(or even through e-mail, if you don't spend too much time with social media).

We act with each other on the internet like we do in our cars.
We say things and act in ways we'd never *dare*, face-to-face---
---falsely feeling this *distance* as we interact so closely.
...And in this pretend-distance, letting all of this bluntness and disrespect
just flood through our fingers without a second thought.
---As if the people we're talking with are only that flat,
little two-dimensional picture of their baby smiling in the corner,
and don't really *exist* for there to be any kind of repercussion to face
for the fact of being just plain rude and obnoxious.

People lash out at each other over the slightest thing.
Venting all of their pent-up frustration about
their strained relationships away from the computer,

and the stress they're feeling over the fact that their kid just slammed the door on their face

because they wouldn't let 'em go to the Pharell Williams concert with their questionable friend.

(I don't know who's popular anymore in music, these days. Had to look up the Billboard charts)

I actually got caught up in one of those horrible, stress-venting conversations just the other day.

Someone I care about (a lot) posted something that made a lot of people mad.

I stepped in, trying to break it up and spread some peace.

...Whoops. ...*That* didn't happen.

Jumping into this thread, I was trying to be very pastoral

and responsible in shedding light on *all* sides of the conflict,

Aaand, I found that doesn't really work as well in the virtual world as it does out here.

Way too much road rage on the information superhighway.

Nobody wants to hear anyone make *sense*. They only want to make their *point*.

And this woman, who I hear is actually a pretty nice person away from the keyboard,

Just started tearing into me with all of these nonsensical,

purely aggressive statements that had nothing to do with anything we were talking about.

Sort of just egging me on.

Trying to make me angry with these really general,

inflammatory statements she thought might ruffle my feathers.

Tried to make me feel low for trying to lift people up.

Started ridiculing a preacher for preaching.

(Though I hadn't mentioned God or morality, or any pulpit pulp)

...And I just thought to myself afterward...

...still feeling just so DIRTY after walking away from all of that clutter....

...would she have said any of those crazed things she said

if we'd been standing face-to-face?...Looking each other in the eye?

If we'd been sitting on a couch together, having the very same conversation,

... me sitting there in the tabbed collar...

...would she ever have so strangely and viciously

accosted a minister for trying to keep the peace?

...Pretty sure the answer would be *no*.

We become so BLIND to each other, these days.

In this world of mashed up showing and sharing,

all of it carrying so little accountability, we lose sight of each other.

We lose sight of who we are, and how we should be in each other's company.

And this is where our scripture readings come to us, and our own experience of life, this morning.

See, an interesting thing happened in the middle of all of that muddy mess online Thursday night.

When I entered into that conversation, as messy as the thing was,

I didn't start into it the way I would have even just a few years ago.

In the past, I would've sort of boldly cracked my fingers,

intent on thrusting my own point,
and my own thoughts as brilliantly and persuasively as possible.

This time, I found myself jumping in for the sake of---*trying*---
---to make things better for the people involved.

I was worried for each of the people talking.

And about each of the feelings being expressed---maybe being hurt---between the lines.

In the past, when that anonymous woman stabbed at me, a pure stranger,
for the sake of no reasonable thought but to *hurt*, and be angry,
...a stream of horrifying expletives would have flooded that screen. Not from her, but
from me.

Just as blindly as I needed to be to do it, I would've done *everything* I could,
to put her in her place in an as embarrassing and shocking way as I could possibly
imagine.

In a very angry, very Italian sort of way.

But this time, I found myself still doing whatever I could to bring it back to the *peace*,
Reminding her that we didn't actually know each other, and had no real beef.

...Wow, that's so different than the way I've been with people in the past.

And as I typed the words, I practically had to pinch myself,
because I felt almost a stranger to myself.

I realized that something new had happened inside of me, over just these past few years.

I realized that a different way of seeing, had changed the way I viewed the world, and
people,

And the way I felt I should be in other people's company.

And I knew it came from nothing other than my experience of GOD,
and of you and of others, over these years I've been in ministry.

As a result of this Christian experience we share with each other in this room, and out there.

---Now, I should definitely clarify: once I left that screen,
those new lenses unfortunately sort of slipped off and fell to the floor.

I wish I could say I left that screen still seeing the way I saw
while I was interacting with that woman.

But no. The Italian came roaring back. The anger I kept myself from sharing with *her*,
flooded from whatever part of the brain it is that
processes pure rage into the very depths of my bones.

Not good. ...Ky can attest. Came home from work at 11:30ish
to a raging whirlwind of confusion and pain.

(Thank God for him. He's always there when I fall to lift me back up.

He gets to see all of the mess in me,
after I come home from being much neater with everybody else)

And this whirlwind was swirling all around me,
because I actually felt a sense of *panic* over the fact that I'd felt this change.

I was more comfortable---more familiar---with trying to show the strength of *anger*,
than I was the strength of holding back and holding up.

Felt almost disoriented by it.

And I felt overwhelmed by the horrible ways
we're so willing to damage the preciousness of the life inside of each other,

Over things so trite. So trivial. So meaningless compared to the sacredness of each soul.

The space between us is so cluttered. So muddy. Especially these days.

It was so, so messy, in different ways, but in ways just as extreme,
just as dangerous, just as blinding---and even worse---

In the days Jesus lived and breathed and walked with us here.

And our reading from the gospel of John, speaks to us about this *change* inside that comes,

As we spend more and more time in the warmth of the light of God.

About this way we begin to see the world with *new eyes*

as we spend more time in the heart of God.

Now, it's important to remember, when reading the gospel of John,
that the writing here is different from the rest.

Unique from the other gospels.

Whoever wrote it, in the Johannine Community

(the group who followed the traditions of the disciple, John)---

--they were talented in their work.

This isn't just straight documentation, but a spiritual work of art.

The entire gospel is soaked in symbolism.

So when we read from this book of the New Testament,

it requires some deeper sight. ...A closer look.

I won't repeat the passage now, because [our liturgist] already took time with the long stretch of text,

but I definitely recommend you take a moment to read it and read it again,
 And meditate on each word. Paying close attention. Maybe as a Lenten devotional,
 in your quiet time with God, away from here.

This passage isn't just about a straight miracle---

---the amazing sight of a man, blind from birth, suddenly being *healed*.

It's also about this *transformation* that happens inside of each one of *us*
 as a result of our experience of God.

It's not just about the blind man, but about *you* and me.

It's about the way God helps us to see past all of the dirty mud and *muck* of the world,
 and look out from inside, with deeper sight.

With *different* sight. With *new* sight, from *new eyes*,

as we move away from the ways we've been taught to be since birth,

And into *new life*--- a different way of being---with each other.

This story from the Gospel of John is about the ways

the light and the warmth of God changes our hearts and our minds,

---seeing things that we never would've have seen without being close with God.

...That startling change, I talked about before, which *disorients* us and *confuses* us,

As we find ourselves suddenly *different* in the way we are in the company of others.

It's about suddenly finding ourselves looking at the world,

suddenly realizing that each thing we see is smothered in the soul of God,

And that we are all a part of each other,

...And in this knowledge, seeing the faces in front of us,
 not from the crippled blindness of our own selfish human ways,
 ---Our rough ways, our calloused ways, our insulting, and harmful ways---
 But instead, in just the slightest way,
 all of the sudden looking *out* in the way God looks into *us*.

These words show us that transformation in our hearts
 that pulls our focus out from only ourselves, and into others,
 Knowing we're all the same Thing---all of us being holy,
 precious pieces of the soul of God, together.

...It's about those words [our liturgist] read from 1 Samuel---verse seven---which says:

7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "... for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

The change in the blind man is that strange change I felt
 when I found myself suddenly typing into the mess of that conversation,
 Not for the sake of my own stuff...
 ..but for the sake of trying to ease the people caught up in all of that needless conflict.
 That weird change I found when that woman was insulting me so mindlessly...
 ...and surprisingly not reacting with the same mindless hate,
 but still hoping to share some love.

It was suddenly seeing that all of that superficial stuff on the outside, was in no way worth
 hurting the precious souls inside of each other.

Just like when we spend a lot of time with a specific friend,
we start strangely taking on each other's mannerisms,
each others ways, each other's sense of humor...

The more time we spend with God---the more we listen
to the holy Life that breathes each second inside of us---

The more we begin seeing things not so much from our own limited perspective,
but from the more tender, more caring, and much wider sight of our loving God.

...The more we begin taking that light inside of us,
that love inside, and giving it away as freely as its been given to us.

Now, unfortunately, this change doesn't instantly take over,
like it did with that man at the Pools of Siloam.

It takes time. This change grows inside of us, as we grow in God...

...and slowly begins taking over our spirit

as we keep walking further and further down the path God leads us.

We don't go from being selfish to selfless in an instant.

Remember those new lenses slipping from my eyes and falling to floor,
just as I stood up from that screen.

---That angry Italian coming back in that whirlwind of pain and anger,

I thankfully didn't show to that woman caught up in a craze.

...But our hope as companions of God, is that as we walk further and further ahead in
God's light,

we'll see more and more beyond ourselves, past the small places inside,

Until eventually one day, our eyes will be clear enough of all of that clutter,
to the point that we might see---without having to strain too hard---

Our own self in the eyes of each face we look into.

...Until we see God's light in the light of the eyes we pass as we pass from here to there.

Friends, we live in a cluttered, messy time---full of beeps, and notifications,
and stuffed inboxes, and constant texts, and empty, self-serving conversations.

We share so much---show so much of ourselves---in so many different ways, these days,
while seeing very little of each other past all of that muddled muck.

...Just like in Jesus' time, this so often leaves us blind toward each other,
and empty of the fullness of real love and true connection.

During this season of Lent, and each day after,

let's do our best to focus past all of the muddy mess in front of our eyes, and look deeper.

Let's do what we can to look into the world in the light of God's love...

----As Sent People, giving it as often as it's given to us in our experience of the holy.

...Allowing ourselves to see with new eyes,

as clearly as we can, the beauty of God's life in the life of each other.

Holding it up. Holding it precious. Embracing each other with all of the strength in our
soul,

So that others might be smothered in the healing warmth of God's light,

And see for themselves the glory of God's love spread wide through this world.

Amen.

