

As you know, some of us at St. Andrew’s have been joining with others around the Episcopal Church in doing the Lenten program *5 Marks of Love*. In his sermon Last week, John shared about his experience with the Listening Hand Exercise, when he was asked to reflect on 5 people who had been a channel of God’s grace in his life. The exercise for this coming week is called a God Sighting Map, which invites us to locate God’s presence and activity in our surroundings and in our interactions with others, considering every day, “Who or what has been a sign of God’s love to you today?”

The Gospel according to John, which we are hearing throughout much of the season of Lent, is all about signs. While the other gospels are filled with miracles, John doesn’t call them miracles. He very deliberately calls them signs, and today’s Gospel reading is one of those signs. Jesus heals a man who is blind from birth in response to his disciple’s question about who sinned, him or his parents. Quickly dispensing with that notion and pointing instead to the opportunity to reveal God’s glory in the present moment, Jesus proceeds to heal the man by mixing his saliva with mud, placing it on his eyes and telling him to go wash in the pool of Siloam.

Now, in the other Gospels, that would pretty much be that – another manifestation of Jesus’ ministry to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, heal the blind and liberate the oppressed. But not here. Here, the man’s recovery of his sight is the beginning of the story – the tip of the iceberg. This is a story with many layers and lots of characters. It is a story about the man’s neighbors – so wrapped up in his identity as a blind beggar that they are the ones with impaired vision – they can’t see anything else about him –and so they wonder if this was in fact the man they had seen grow up this man that they had known as a beggar for oh so many years. So unable to see the man standing in front of them that they talk about him – “isn’t this the man who used to sit and beg” – instead of with him – to the extent that he has to insert himself and say, “Yes it’s me! I am the one. I was blind but now I see.”

This is a story about the Pharisees and Jewish leaders, who were more concerned with Jesus healing on the Sabbath and whether or not **he** was the sinner here than with the man who was given the gift of sight for the first time in his life, so instead of celebration and joy, there is suspicion and rejection. It is a story about the man’s parents, called in front of the Jewish leaders to testify to their son’s blindness, who out of fear throw up their hands and leave their son to

fend for himself saying, "He's old enough to speak for himself. Ask him," and so the man says yet again, "I was blind, the prophet put mud on my eyes, and now I see."

This is a story about Jesus going back out in search of this man, this man, rejected by his community, in order to draw him deeper into relationship with the one who loved the world so much that he sent his only son in order that all who trust in him might have life and have it abundantly. And so the man can say, "I was blind, and Jesus, the Son of Man, put mud on my eyes and now I see, and trust in, and worship him as Lord."

This is the story of the deepening faith of one man and the failure of his community to support that faith. This man had a God sighting in his life – he had a God- encounter – and each time he told the story of this encounter his understanding of Jesus – his trust in Jesus – deepened. He started out saying to his neighbors, rather matter of factly, "I was blind and now I see." He then told his story to the Pharisees under interrogation, and was able to say, "I was blind and this prophet Jesus put mud on my eyes and now I see." Later, still under interrogation, he told his story again, and as it sunk in a little deeper, he said, "I was blind and this devout and obedient man of God put mud on my eyes and now I see." Finally, he encounters Jesus yet again, and this time, he is able to say, "I was blind, and you, the Son of man, put mud on my eyes, and now I see. Now, Lord I believe." And he worshipped Jesus.

It is in the telling of this story that the knowledge and truth of his encounter with the living God seeped deeper and deeper into his being. It was in the telling of his story that he could begin to see Jesus more and more clearly for who he really was and what difference Jesus might make in his life well beyond anything that might happen to his physical being, and so Jesus when sought him and offered yet another encounter he was able to see and be seen – he was able to fully step into the relationship that Jesus offered – he was able to live in the presence of the Lord.

His community, however, missed it – they missed the God sighting – the sign of God's love standing before them – the encounter with the living Lord, so wrapped up they were up in preserving the narrow lens through which they viewed the world.

One of the things I love about this week's exercise, The God Sighting Map, is the invitation it extends to begin to expand the lens through which we view the world, to bear witness to the God-encounter stories that happen all around us every day. As Christians, this is our job – to be alert to the signs of God's love – to harvest those stories for the sake of God's people and to the

glory of God's. So, I want to invite you this week to create a God Sighting Map – to locate God's presence and activity in your surroundings and in your interactions with others, considering every day, "Who or what has been a sign of God's love to me today?" As you do so, allow the lens through which you view the world to expand, hear and bear witness to the God encounter stories that happen around you every day, experience the living presence of the Lord seeping deeper and deeper into your own being, show what it is to see and be seen by the Lord, share what it is to love and be loved. Who or what has been a sign of God's love to you today?

**SSJE's 5 Marks of Love found here:**

<http://ssje.org/ssje/5marksoflove/>

**God Sighting Map activity found here:**

<http://ssje.org/ssje/2017/02/16/activity-guidance-god-sighting-map-week-4/>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3k1c5FG366FVHdOM1lJcy0wR0k/view>