

The Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year A, 2008  
The Rev. Ronald N. Johnson

Saint Paul, writing to the Church in Ephesus, spoke of Jesus as being “light,” telling us, “For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light.” The Gospel reading this morning tells us about the light of Christ. John presents us with a magnificent account of a man born blind. Through Jesus, the man gained his sight. When we seek the spiritual meaning of the story, we begin to understand that faith in Jesus brings spiritual enlightenment, and through faith, God’s grace strengthens us to stand firm against evil. Coming to such faith resembles having the scales of blindness removed from our eyes, and we begin to see life in a new way. That which is old, that which is worn, that which is unworthy stand revealed as unworthy, and we are able to put on the new armor of light. The light of Christ reveals a pathway of spiritual growth that we are now eager to explore. It is a safe path, for we know that the Holy Spirit walks with us and that Christ lights our way.

Saint John’s story of the man born blind is rich in symbolism that takes us far beyond the miracle of healing. What we are to understand from this story is that Christ Jesus is the light of the world. As Jesus opened the blind man’s eyes, because of his faith, Christ opens our eyes, when we have faith, so that we can then see the reality around us. Christ, alone, enables us to see the reality in which we live. In the words of John Newton, the eighteenth century Anglican priest and author of the great hymn *Amazing Grace*, we who were once blind because we were without faith, in finding faith now see.

Faith is God’s greatest gift to us. Faith comes first. We find that it is not so much that we go looking for faith as God brings us faith, and he brings us faith by loving us. This is hard to grasp, but the reality is that we respond, automatically, when we realize God loves us unconditionally, without any reservation, for the simple reason that we exist, with no claim other than being a child of God. When we experience God’s unconditional love, it is natural that we respond in trust and love for him. John the Evangelist tells us, in the Book of Revelation, that Jesus stands at the door of our hearts and knocks. What magnificent imagery: Jesus standing at the door, knocking, patiently awaiting our response. Jesus knocks because he wants to dwell within us, through his Holy Spirit, and when we allow him, which in itself is an act of faith, he brings us increasing faith. John tells us that Jesus stands patiently at the door, praying to his Father that we will answer, that we will respond to his love. There is no force. He does not overwhelm us or attempt to leverage us with his power. He knocks, he prays and he waits.

Salvation really is a process, and for many, if not most of us, it is a life –long process. Sometimes we can point to a specific conversion experience, but for most of us, Jesus is just someone we grew up with and that is okay. That is good. But sometimes we can point to a moment that it finally dawned on us that without God we are very much alone. With God we have the best friend that we shall ever have, and in this moment, when we truly realize that we are dependent on our relationship with God, we stand on the threshold of truly transforming faith. When we realize our dependence on God, we are

able to let our defenses down and we ask Jesus to come into our hearts. The evangelicals call this surrendering to Jesus, and really that is what it is. We say, “Come Lord Jesus, and dwell in me, that I may dwell in you.”

Jesus comes into the hearts of those open to him and willing to accept him. In those moments, faith is built, brick by brick, stone by stone. And, as life progresses, and we have more and more experiences of the grace of God as “Jesus with us, “ our faith grows even stronger. We begin to understand the truth of Saint Paul’s claim that in Christ, all things are possible. We begin to understand, again in Saint Paul’s words, that while once we lived in darkness, now we dwell in the light. We can say, with John Newton, that thought we were blind, now we see. It truly is *Amazing Grace*. *Amen*.

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