

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

***“God does not see as man sees; man looks at appearances but the Lord looks at the heart.”***

1 Samuel 16, 7

***Jesus said to him (the man whose sight had been restored): “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”***

***“Sir,” the man replied “tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said: “You are looking at him; he is speaking to you.”***

***The man said: “Lord, I believe”, and worshipped him. Jesus said: “I came into this world to bring everything into the clear light of day, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind.”***

John 9, 1-41



Today’s gospel reading revolves around irony and paradox: A blind man has the insight to recognize and the faith to believe that Jesus is the Christ of God. The Pharisees who have seen and heard Jesus and witnessed the miracles he has done refuse to recognize him for who he is and persist in their blindness. This touches on a recurring theme in John’s Gospel: Those least likely to accept Jesus are the ones who reach out to him in faith and embrace him - the Samaritan woman, the court official whose son was cured, the woman caught in adultery. In contrast, the religious leaders who witnessed his miracles and frequently heard him speak and interpret the Law, could not bring themselves to welcome and accept him. The contrast is stark and telling: the educated, religious people who should have been able to recognize Jesus, refuse to accept him and his message, probably because their comfort would have been disturbed; those who have done it tough or messed up their lives come to recognize him for who he is and they accept him.

In a collection of Zen stories edited by Paul Reps, there’s a piece entitled *The Tunnel* which beautifully complements today’s gospel:

Zenkai, the son of a samurai, journeyed to Edo and there became the retainer of a high official. He fell in love with the official’s wife and was discovered. In self-defence, he slew the official. Then he ran away with the wife.

Both of them later became thieves. But the woman was so greedy that Zenkai grew disgusted. Finally, leaving her, he journeyed far away to the provinces of Buzen, where he became a wandering beggar.

To atone for his past, Zenkai resolved to accomplish some good deed in his lifetime. Knowing of a dangerous road over a cliff that had caused death and injury to many persons, he resolved to cut a tunnel through the mountain there.

Begging food in the daytime, Zenkai worked at night digging his tunnel. When thirty years had gone by the tunnel was 2,280 feet long, 20 feet high and 30 feet wide.

Two years before the work was completed, the slain official’s son, a skillful swordsman who had been searching for his father’s killer all those years, finally discovered Zenkai’s whereabouts and came to exact revenge.

“I will give you my life willingly,” said Zenkai. “Only let me finish this work. On the day it is completed, then you may kill me.”

The son could see the value of what Zenkai was doing and agreed to wait until the task of digging the tunnel was finished.

Several months passed, and Zenkai kept on digging. The son grew tired of doing nothing and began to help with the digging. After he had helped for more than a year, he came to admire Zenkai's strong will and character.

At last the tunnel was completed and the people could use it to journey in safety.

"Now you may kill me, for my work is done," said Zenkai.

But with tears in his eyes, the official's son replied: "How could I possibly kill a man who has taught me so much?"

In today's gospel, Jesus cures a man born blind. However, the greater miracle is that many of those who witnessed the miracle had their eyes opened and were able to see in Jesus the presence of God among them. In *The Tunnel*, the eyes of Zenkai are opened to the evil he has done but also to the possibility of making up for his past through service of others. Furthermore, the son of the murdered official is able to see beyond his desire for revenge as he allows himself to be touched by the lessons he has learned from an older, wiser and contrite Zenkai. And so he brings himself to forgive.

In all of this, there is a challenge for us to see the damage we can do to ourselves and others when we stereotype people and put labels on them. There is also an invitation to us to set aside any plans we make to settle old scores and to focus only on satisfying our one selfish interests. Our homes, communities, and places of work would be much healthier if we could only see the love of God reflected in all the good things that happen and all the decent people we meet.