

*“Discern God’s Power!”*

This Reading is about Jesus healing, on the Sabbath day, a man born blind. The religious authorities’ response demonstrated many of them were spiritually blind. The Text focuses on discerning God’s Power and being accountable for one’s response. This is especially meaningful, as we approach Easter Sunday in less than a month and then, soon afterward, go through our Personal Dedication Program. Easter and our Personal Dedication Program raise up this question, **“How is God’s Power available to each of us and how will you and I utilize it?”**

The Reading begins with Jesus’ disciples asking him whose sin caused the man to be born blind. Jesus never expressed support for the popular view of their society, which claimed a person’s sufferings were punishments resulting from his or her sin or the sins of an ancestor. Instead, Jesus seized the opportunity to challenge that false belief about suffering being punishment because of sin. He also utilized the situation to illustrate God’s Power and Presence. Jesus said in **verse 3**, *“His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parents’ sins. He is blind so that God’s Power might be seen at work in him.”*

The man’s blindness, Jesus’ healing action, and the chain of events, which followed, provided an important moment of discernment. Jesus went on to connect what was about to happen to his purpose in **verses 4 and 5**, when he said, *“As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him Who sent me; night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the Light for the world.”* As the Youth Skit alluded, without light, everyone is blind. We are told in verses 6 and 7 how Jesus healed the man of his blindness. When he was able to see, those who had known him, publicly debated whether or not he was the blind man they had seen begging for a long period of time. The former blind man then announced he was the man and explained how he had come to be healed.

He was then taken to the Pharisees and they were very unhappy because he was cured on the Sabbath. There was a division among the people over whether or not the healer sinned. Out of the refusal of the authorities to believe the man had been born blind and then, could see, they called for the man’s parents and questioned them. The parents said he had been born blind but they refused to make any comments about how he was cured.

The gospel writer explained in **verse 22**, *“His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, who had already agreed that anyone who said he believed that Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue.”* The authorities brought the cured man back in for questioning and he stood firm in his retelling of the facts.

In their attempts to ridicule the man and his healer, they were themselves exposed for their folly. In their unhappiness with the turn of events, **verse 34 reports they said**, *“You were born and brought up in sin — and you are trying to teach us?” And they expelled him from the synagogue.”*

Learning what had happened, Jesus found the healed man and revealed himself to him. After the former blind man declared his belief, Jesus said in **verse 39**, *“I came to this world to judge, so that the blind should see and those who see should become blind.”*

Now, perhaps some of us recall recent sermons on the Gospel of John in which I have pointed out, how

early in his public ministry, Jesus moved away from the judgmental emphasis encouraged upon him by John the Baptist. So, you may be thinking, “Pastor, in verse 39 Jesus said he came to judge.” Although, on the face of it, what Jesus seems to be saying in verse 39 is a contradiction to my statements, let’s also remember **Jesus said in John 3:17, “For God did not send His Son into the world to be its Judge, but to be its Savior.”** So, Jesus said the title, which most accurately described his purpose is “Savior” instead of “Judge”. How, then, are we to understand what Jesus meant in verse 39 of today’s Reading?

Jesus was not talking about being the world’s “Judge” but of being our “Savior”! **More accurately, Jesus declared he came not to judge others but to enable peoples’ judgment or discernment or insight; so those from whom the Truth had been hidden would discern it and those, who claimed – almost boasted – they already knew the Truth and, indeed, should have known the Truth, would be exposed for not knowing it, and instead, would be revealed to be those, who in reality, refused to know the Truth – refused to accept Jesus.**

We see verification of this interpretation of verse 39 in verse 40 because it revealed some of the religious authorities suspected that interpretation to be the meaning of what Jesus was saying. **Verse 40 reports, “Some Pharisees who were there with him heard him say this and asked him, ‘Surely you don’t mean that we are blind, too?’”**

Now, to more fully understand the dynamics of Jesus’ confrontation with the Pharisees, we need to remember he knew they were already plotting to kill him. Jesus responded to the Pharisees’ feigning innocence by saying in **verse 41, “If you were blind, then you would not be guilty; but since you claim that you can see, this means that you are still guilty.”** Unfortunately, the authors of the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke portrayed the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin, the Jerusalem Religious Authorities, to have only been plotting to kill Jesus at the very conclusion of his public ministry.

In about a month, **Round Grove United Church will be going through our Personal Dedication Program to discern – to determine how we will commit to give back to God from our God given gifts.** We will decide how we will participate in the varied and different opportunities of service in this congregation’s ministries. So, I urge each of us to begin thinking about and praying to discern how God’s Power is manifested in the gifts of abilities, time, and energy, which we have received through the Holy Spirit.

Of course, the starting point for us is our discerning – our seeing the Light – about how God has gifted us by manifesting our Divine Parent’s Love for us through sending God’s Son, Jesus Christ, to prove God’s Self-Giving and Suffering “Agape” Love for us. What I just spoke is what the Bulletin Cover for today highlights – John 3:16. The Creator revealed through Jesus how the Almighty has forgiven us and given us a New Relationship with God and one another along with the Reconciled Life, which is lived by citizens of God’s Eternal Kingdom. **After discerning God’s Love for us in Jesus Christ, let us commit to follow Jesus’ example of Living the New Life of self-giving and sacrificial love. Also, we are called to share with others how Jesus Christ is our Savior – not our Judge! As we lay claim to Jesus Christ as our Savior, we are called to discern – to see the Light, to be good stewards of God’s Power, which is given to us in our gifts of time, talent, and energy for Christ’s service! Amen.**