

**St Mark's, Niagara on the Lake**  
**The Fourth Sunday in Lent, year 'A'**  
**19 March 2023**  
**The Rev'd Leighton Lee**

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After serving me a drink, one of my first mentors among the clergy would always raise his glass and say, "Here's mud in your eye." I always thought that was a weird thing to say when raising a glass—but I think I now get it. It's like saying, "To your health." And why have I come to think that? Because of what we just heard: mud in the eye brings healing. Saying that probably makes me sound like I'm off my rocker. But think about it: we've all heard about the purported healing properties of a mud bath at the spa, and even a poultice made of mud can reduce inflammation from an insect bite.

But this is as much a story about blindness as it is about mud and health. In Scripture, blindness is always a sign about something deeper. In this instance, it's about the emotional and spiritual impairment of vision which so often characterize human affairs. How often do we talk of someone not being able to see beyond the tip of their nose or having a blind spot? In this morning's gospel, John addresses the myopia even people of faith can show towards those most in need of God's healing mercy. Some of them seem willing to believe that the man was never even blind and that this miraculous healing must be some kind of hoax. All of them refuse to see what is right in front of them.

So this story tells a deep truth: It's often the people whom we, or the world, or the Church, consider blind—or, to put it bluntly—are ignorant, benighted, in the dark—who have within themselves the inner vision of God's faithfulness. This story tells us it's amidst the blindness and scantiness of this world that the Kingdom of God emerges, a kingdom in which things which were considered marks of sin and ignorance are, in fact, the means by which God discloses his loving and redemptive purposes.

Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Now, you and I are religious people and, like the religious people in our text, we ourselves tend to be somewhat blinkered and censorious. So we need to see ourselves in the blind man and recognize that he represents our own emotional and spiritual blindness, blindness which isolates and disables each one of us.

We're told the man in this morning's gospel was a beggar. He had nothing, not even the seemingly rock-solid religious certainty of the disciples and the Pharisees. Yet because he had nothing, he was able to believe that the man who stood before him offered him everything. His going to the pool was an act of faith. Thus his receiving of physical sight was really a bonus because he got what he most desired—a lively faith.

In other words, Jesus not only gave the blind man his sight, he taught him how to see. When God stands before you and me, we're in the presence of a new way of seeing and being. This is the mystery and miracle of redemptive love, the divine mystery, the hidden eternal, which emerges among—and is revealed in—people, places, and events in a world where God is easily overlooked, since there's always so much dust from all sorts of things—fear, hurt, pride—in our eyes so that we're blinded to the One who is closer to us than we are to ourselves and who has revealed his name as Love.

Akira Kurosawa's majestic and arresting film *Ran* closes with a desolate image. A blind peasant named Tsurumaru stands at the edge of a precipice clutching a scroll bearing an image of the Buddha. He stumbles and drops the scroll over the cliff where it falls into a crevice. Then he steps back, forlorn and alone.

It's an image for our times and for our own lives, because the truth is, all of us are as blind beggars before the gods of this age, the gods of our society, the gods of our vanity, all of which are illusory. So when we lose our grip on life and our illusions fall away from us into the chasm of despair, and when the winds of life tear our familiar—if feckless—gods from our hands, we become frightened and cannot see anything. All we can perceive is the deep, deep verge before us that chasms and steepens sheer into infinite space.

Yet it's also in these moments of utter helplessness, at those times when we lose our grip on all we've put our faith in, when we realize that we can't see the way ahead, when we fear for the future, when all the devices and props we have used have failed us, when the dust of the world gets into our eyes, when the way grows dim, when the powers of the world blindside us, that we perceive Christ's trenchant question, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" It's in these dark moments when we find the grace to answer, "Lord, I believe."

When Jesus comes to us and takes away our blindness of heart, when we get the dust of this life out of our eyes long enough to see the hidden God standing before us, we can let go of many things—be they hurts, resentments, fears, prejudices. And then we can go on our own two feet to the place of healing where we can be washed from all of the shame and doubt that has blinded us to our own loveliness. We can go on our own two feet to the place where spilled blood makes all things clean, all things whole, all things new. But to get to that place we must walk through the valley of the shadow of death. There is no other way. Yet there is strength for the journey. It's found in the silver cup which even now is set before us. Truly mud in your eye.