

The Rev. Canon Ranjit K. Mathews
Lent 4
Church of the Holy Trinity, Middletown
3/19/2023

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. It is so good to be here. I think I was supposed to come maybe a year ago or so, and then I got Covid, so that didn't happen. I am also so glad to be here with Rev. Mary, and for those of you who don't know, we worked together four years ago when I was serving as Rector of St. James, in New London. So it a real delight to be here.

Oh, gosh I love being here in Lent. Anybody with me about this? In our world which is so go, go and go; this feels like an abundance of time and reflection. And yet, as Church, don't we so often fill it up. There is an activist by the name of Grace Lee Boggs who said, "these are the times to grow our souls. Each of us is called upon to embrace the conviction that despite the powers and principalities bent on commodifying all our human relationships, we have the power within us to create the world anew."

Lent is very much like the pandemic if you were with me. We had the time to focus in on ourselves; but we were so caught up that we couldn't take the time. And yet the invitation we all have is for our wholeness. One part of my work around the diocese is to help us remember that we are connected to one another; that in fact while American culture, writ large, says that we should be self-sufficient, we are as Christians the body of Christ and we actually need to be dependent on one another. My contention is that we are more often Americans than we are Christians, and part of the Body of Christ. Just think of this, how often has one of us, or let's make it more local to you all, how often have you shared a need, where you dared to risk vulnerability? This is very hard for me to do, how about you. Can you share that need? I need help, I need your support. That is probably one of the most radical things of the Gospel, the fact that it is about the collective.

Are we not the blind man in this Gospel? Born into a culture which conditions us to be self-sufficient; and then Jesus comes with his spit and Holy Spirit; and we can see with the eyes of our hearts. And we are baptized in Jesus, as a community of the Holy Spirit, and yet I wonder if we have been made blind again, if we need to intentionally take the spit and wash our eyes so that we can see again.

What do we need to confess, as Christians on this day, the day that the Lord has made, so that we can see again. Our wholeness as Christians, and in particular that we have this gift of Lent is this wilderness period of reflection and repentance. Are we not like this blind man? Are we able as individuals to name those places where we are blind? Where we are not able to see? Our own healing begins, when we are honest with ourselves. Are there places where we are not being honest with ourselves, and thus that is where we are blind?

There was a monk at a monastery called, the Society of St. John the Divine, his name was Martin Smith, and at the time, he was also the Superior. He told a story that I found to be instructive. He had gotten sick and was in the hospital, and after some time of care he was able to leave as he was well again. His reflection upon that time was that while he was well again, he was entering into a world that was profoundly sick. It is filled with principalities and powers that are governing our world with injustice.

About a month or so ago, I was a part of what we know as the Anglican Consultative Council. Story about the Slave Castle. There were 4 million Africans who were a part of that slave castle. After we finished that, we went into a Service of Reconciliation; and that was not the right course to take, in fact it was spiritual malpractice. We first need to acknowledge, grieve, repent, repair and then get to a place of reconciliation. I mention this story, because our lack of being able to be honest, and real, leaves us in a state of blindness. We are unable to see.

And yet, as Bryan Stevenson says, once we acknowledge the truth, there is beauty there.

And yet my friends, as we hear from Paul's letter to the Galatians, our vocation is to be "children of light." That is our vocation, my friends. And yet for us to fully lean into that space; we have to admit that we too are like the blind man. And we may yet need to have Jesus speak to us again, and again, and again, and wash our eyes so we can see again.

This time of Lent gives us that space to reflect and repent, as we are able. This means that we need to be intentional about our inner lives. And the truth is our society does not make space for reflection, because we are always hustling to prove our worth. Our American society does not make space for Lent, for quiet; because every part of our day is consumed with something. Even our retired lives are full. And yet to fully take on the vocation to be children of light, it is a process, right? It is like a pregnant space, where something might be birthing.

My friends, we who call ourselves believers, we need intention. It is not going to magically happen, just because we want it to happen. Our wills are our own. Our honesty and our confession, open up deeper possibility of grace from God. Don't get me wrong, grace can happen anytime, and yet, when we do the inner work with God; more beauty is opened up to us. We can be children of light, if we intentionally choose to be.

Amen.