

John Sampson
"The Great Work"
Text: John 9:1 – 7
Preached at KVCC
March 8, 2020

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words you my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

Today, we take another step on our journey of Lent, our journey with Jesus as he moves closer to Jerusalem, to the cross, and beyond. And last week I shared with those who were here my thoughts that the season of Lent works to both make us more aware of the brokenness of our lives, while at the same time providing us with a blueprint of how we can heal that brokenness.

Starting today the church, the big Church, would have us hear over the next three weeks the story of Nicodemus who meets Jesus at night, and is told he needs to be reborn, and takes what he's heard literally, and asks how can we crawl back into the womb and be born again. Then we are supposed to hear the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well and offering her living water. Finally, in the third week are we to hear the story of Jesus healing the man born blind, which we started today.

All of these stories are really long, and really deep, and I could share 100 reflections on each. So instead of trying to whip through each one of these readings I've chosen to slow down. We're going to read only one of the stories, this final story of the healing blindness, and we'll read it over the next couple of weeks.

So, last week we heard the story of Eden, the story of humanity's experience of living in deep intimacy with each other, with Creation and with God. And how that intimacy was broken, and still is broken, through our unbounded desire. At the end of the story we read past the verses given to us by our tradition, and read further on to the point at which God shows up as the humans are leaving Eden and gifts them each with a set of clothes. Clothes that will protect them, and keep them warm in the new world they are venturing out into. Clothes that are the manifestation of God's continued love and care for her children.

And here we are east of Eden.

We're here living outside of paradise in this morning's story, and we're here outside of paradise in our own lives.

And we're greeted with a story of a miraculous healing.

How will we live in a world outside of the walls of Eden? How will we live in a world defined by brokenness?

We will live here by working miracles.

Mic drop.

End of the story.

Thanks for coming to worship, because what else do I need to say?

Well...maybe there is a just little bit more to say.

This week a friend of this congregation sent me a news article about a church in Vermont that is going through the discernment process to understand if they feel called to become a Creation Justice church, just like we are. They're trying to understand how their sense of faith calls them to live in a more aware and intentional state in a world that is sick and dying.

And I was struck by something the pastor of that congregation said in the article. He said, "Hope reveals that you believe something is true and beautiful and worthwhile, regardless of the outcome."

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Change a couple of words and I think this quote tells us everything we need to know about what miracles could mean for us today, in an age when the possibility of miracles seems dim at best.

Working for a miracle reveals that you work for something because it is true and beautiful and worthwhile regardless of the outcome.

Living in this world east of Eden where there is so much violence and conflict, in a nation divided that has lost its sense of common purpose, in a land of increasing economic stratification and continued racial disparity we may pray for a miracle because we can't see the way forward, we can't see where the healing we so desperately hunger for will come from.

But Jesus tells us exactly where it will come from.

It will come from us.

In today's reading our teacher turns his gaze to his followers, to people just like you and me, and he says that we must work the works of the one who sent him. And then he

proceeds to show us what this looks like. It looks like Jesus miraculously healing a man who has been blind since birth.

And we're left dumbstruck, and disbelieving.

The miracle is hard enough to wrap our minds around. That we, you and me, are called to this work too makes us wonder if all the naysayers of our faith aren't really on to something.

I can't heal like Jesus healed. I know of no one who could do what this story we hear this morning tells us he did.

But, as I said last week, our journey of Lent teaches us through stories and parables. It tells us a great truth, even if the stories and parables it uses aren't true in an empirical, historical way.

Did Jesus really heal a man born blind by spitting in dirt and rubbing it on the man's eyes. As a child of the Enlightenment it is hard for me to accept this story at face value. But our spiritual ancestors are not simply teaching us about a historical event. They are teaching us to embrace a posture of activity in our world. They are asking us to commit to an ethics that holds nothing back when it comes to truth, and beauty, and compassion.

Work for beauty, they tell us. Even if you think your work may not succeed.

Work for healing even if it is a long shot.

Work for justice in a land that has legalized injustice.

There is another story of Jesus healing a blind man in the gospel according to Mark, and it's the story of a healing that doesn't really work the first time. A blind man is brought to Jesus and Jesus spits in his eyes. The man begins to see but he sees the people around him as trees. So Jesus has to try again. He puts his hands on the man's eyes, and this time the man can see perfectly.

To live in a land that is east of Eden requires us to commit to two things. The first is to have an audacious vision, to imagine that the brokenness we experience in our lives and in the world around us does not define us, that we can work towards restoring the intimacy among our selves and Creation and God we know is possible in our guts.

And the second is that we commit to being healers, to being miracle workers. Working for beauty and justice and compassion, even if we may fail the first time, and the second time, and the hundredth time, even if all the odds are against us.

Because this is the great work, the work of light. And this is the work that so many of us are already committed to. I look around this room and I see so many who are working towards

making our world a better place, even if we are not sure that all of our efforts will make a difference. I look around this room and I see it filled with miracle workers.

Amen.