

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

John 9:1-41
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
March 29, 2014

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, look at my face and see if you can tell me where I am planning to go. Maybe my smiling face tells you that I am happy and am going to go to visit someone I love or to attend a party. What are some other happy places to go? Look at my face again. Where do you think I am going this time? Maybe my sad face tells you that I am going to a funeral for someone who has died, or to visit a sick friend, or to do a job I don't like. What are some other sad places to go?

Now look at this picture. Who is this? Yes, it is Jesus. Can you tell me some things about Jesus? (Birth, baptism, healing people, feeding people...) An artist named **Warner Sallman** painted this picture called "**Head of Christ.**" Many people and churches have this painting up for everyone to see. This one hangs right inside of our church's front doors.

The artist painted this picture of Jesus after he read this Bible verse: "**As the time drew near when Jesus would be taken up to heaven, he made up his mind and set out on his way to Jerusalem.**" Do you remember what happened to Jesus at Jerusalem? That is where they hung him on the cross and he died. Jesus knew that he was headed for Jerusalem. And he knew that he would be killed there. Can you see the sadness in his face? He was thinking about the pain, about his friends who would run away and leave him there, about the people who would laugh at him... Jesus was looking forward to going to a very sad and painful place. Jesus did that for us and for all people.

But, look at this picture again. Can you see some happiness on Jesus' face too? It is hard, but I think that Jesus was kind of glad for where he was going too. Jesus knew that once he had died on the cross and come back alive, people would be able to see how much God loves us. And Jesus knew that God would forgive the people for what they did. And he knew that when we die, we will all be able to go to heaven and live with God (Father/Son/Holy Spirit) forever – no more pain, no more dying, but lots of love and joy forever. Jesus is happy that he loves us. And Jesus is happy when we love him! Do you love Jesus? Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Jesus found a man who was blind from birth. That man must have had no idea what it was to see. He and everyone else accepted him being that way. He'd always been that way. This man, unnamed in our text, is known only as the man who had been born blind. **He was defined by his limitation/problem rather than by his possibility.**

Picture with me a beautiful, breath-taking sunrise or sunset. Our new friend could not share that vision with us. He never knew what he was missing. Then Jesus found him. Jesus is kind of known for looking for people who could use a hand. Have you ever noticed that?

When Jesus and his disciples came upon the blind man, Jesus told them, **“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”** What did Jesus mean by that? For a blind man, could **light** be a hopeful word? Is Jesus being the **“light of the world”** hopeful for you? Does Jesus being the light of the world mean anything good for our teenagers, for our young adults, for our seniors?

I worshiped on the beach last Sunday. Jennifer and I were on the Island of Maui and discovered a beach worship service. We found ourselves gathered with 100 others, 100 feet from the water's edge, tucked under an outdoor bar/cafe canopy. I was sitting 15 feet from shelves filled with liquor. The person on one side of us was from California and the person on the other was from Texas. The service had songs in the Hawaiian language and included some hula dancing. I'm thinking that we are going to try some hula dancing at First Lutheran next week... No, maybe not...

While the 100 of us worshiped, hundreds of others walked by between us and the sea. Many scanned us with questioning looks on their faces. Throughout our time in Hawaii, we kept hearing, **“Nobody knows you here. Do whatever you like.”** One hundred of us chose to worship. What did those who passed by us see as we worshiped there on the beach? Were they wishing they could **join us**? Did they think that we were **nut cases**? It was a case of God's people worshiping despite our world's questions, or maybe even for the sake of our world's questions. It was certainly **“public worship.”**

What do people who pass by First Lutheran during our worship see? What do they see as we live out our Christian lives? I bet that there are a lot of people living right here in Aitkin who couldn't tell you one thing about this faith family. Although many would know of the food shelf that we host. Some may have attended the community meal that we host. Some may have caught part of our worship service while channel surfing on Sunday morning radio or Wednesday morning cable television. Many would have seen some of us out there on the streets. Some have surely seen you.

Sometimes we are each and all blind to the things around us, to certain people in our lives, to our own emptiness, hurts and needs... **Sometimes we are blind to God's presence standing right there in front of us...** Or, the vision that we do have of God is not good.

Someone sent me the following piece on our view of mothers. It portrays how we might see our moms at various ages throughout our lives.

- 6 years - "**Mommy, I love you.**"
- 10 years - "**Mom, whatever.**"
- 16 years - "**My Mom is so annoying.**"
- 18 years - "**I wanna leave this house.**"
- 25 years - "**Mom, you were right.**" (How many can remember hearing that?)
- 30 years - "**I wanna go to Mom's house.**"
- 50 years - "**I don't wanna lose my Mom.**"
- 70 years - "**I would give up everything for my Mom to be here with us.**"

I think that these are pretty accurate reflections of the stages of our relationship with our moms/parents. **Who changed, mother or child?** I think that the **older we grow, the more clearly we can see genuine love and caring.** What do you think? Hopefully parents deeply love their kids throughout the kids' entire lives. The kids just don't always realize how precious the love of their parents is.

Jesus said, "**As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.**"

Our teens are trying to discover who they are. Everyone goes through it. In the teen years, our young people are beginning their separation from their parents, emotionally at first and then, eventually, physically as well. The world our teens live in is trying very hard to convince them that they:

- **Know everything.**

- **Are mature enough to run their own lives.**
- **Don't need their parents.**
- **Don't need God.**

As children, sheltered and protected by their parents, God is a good, pretty cool. As teens start to question Mom and Dad's teachings/authority, God and every other authority figure also come into question. Once the young person has matured, hopefully they too will see wisdom and love in the way their parents raised them. But, often, they don't see the need for a return to a love/trust relationship with God...

Until our young people have been beaten up by the world long enough, finally, finally maybe – **they start to hear the coaxing, wooing, urging, inviting Word that has always been there.** Jesus said, "**As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.**" At some point, maybe when Jesus finds us out on the road and in trouble, we finally hear and believe Jesus' invitation to **come home to the loving embrace and care of God.**

We come home to **God almighty** and **God close at hand**, **God forgiving** and **God compassionate**, **God empowering** for deeper, richer, more meaningful life... For **life now** and for **life forever**...

In one of our motel rooms in Hawaii, a painting hung above the head of our bed. It showed a young native man sitting in the center of a tiny, dug-out canoe with outrigger floats on one side. The sky was dark and the waves were large and angry looking. There was no sign of land in the distance. Our young man was slumped forward, obviously exhausted from his desperate paddle toward shore. Looking more closely, you can see the ghostly image of two other paddlers, one in the front and one in the back of his canoe. While his paddle rests across his lap, their paddles are still churning the canoe toward home.

I looked this painting up on the internet. It is entitled, "**You have a seat in my canoe.**" Here is part of what the artist, **Leo Hone** wrote.

"In the early hours of the morning, back in the winter of 2000, I awoke from a vision that gave me 'chicken skin.' I could see the painting complete as it now is and I knew something very special had been entrusted to me. For some reason I had been chosen to do this; as a Christian, I felt that God was guiding me... The middle paddler is me. It is you. It is "everyman" – and the stormy sea is the sea of life. The sea can be compared to life itself and the fisherman to every one of

us at some point in our lives... Every person will sooner or later in life experience that middle seat. Just remember, there is always hope. There is always guidance. There is always help. For me, this painting is based on **Psalm 91:11-12** – “For he shall give His angels charge over thee and they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

Again, the painting is called, “**You have a seat in my canoe.**” Is there anybody riding in your canoe with you? Could it be those folks who have gone on ahead of you that impacted your life? Could it be family members, friends or co-workers who are rooting for you right now? Could it be the light of the world?

Jesus said, “**As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.**” Jesus ran into a blind man who had never been able to see a sunrise. Jesus spit in the dust of the earth, made a little mess of mud and put it on the man’s eyes. “**Go wash in the pool of Siloam.**” Jesus’ spit, mud and water, that’s all it took for our friend to see the sunrise... Jesus used the ordinary to bring about the extraordinary in this man’s life. Same God, new life for the man born blind.

When Jesus comes into our world, he changes things. God is **not content with our lives being less than God created them to be.** God doesn’t focus upon our problems or limitations. God focuses upon our possibilities. Jesus doesn’t leave us with just **survival, persistence, getting by...** Jesus wills for us to have **full, rich and abundant life.** That life comes to us by hearing and believing the promise that we have **infinite worth in God’s eyes** and **always will be God’s beloved child.**

Blind? Stormy sea? All worn out? Alone?

Our man born blind had never seen a sunrise... Are you missing anything? Some of us may have **experienced religion** and “**having to go to church.**” **56431.**

Jesus said to the blind man and those other folks back then, “**I am the light of the world.**” Then the blind man went out and watched the sun rise. Jesus still does that sort of thing in our lives today. Do you see? Do you see? Amen.

