

Lent 4, Year A, 040311
All Saints Episcopal Church

In the name of God who creates us, redeems us and sustains us. AMEN.

Well, in case you didn't know it, Major League Baseball season has started. I don't generally pay attention to baseball except for reading what friends post about their favorite teams on FaceBook or until it's time for the World Series. But this past Friday morning, I was watching TV and saw one of those feel-good kind of reports about a woman who is a die-hard Yankees baseball fan. Not just any woman, mind you, but a woman who is blind from birth. Who loves the Yankees. Who is a season ticket holder. She and her seeing-eye dog, Clipper, have gone by themselves to more than 200 games. They get there on foot, on the train and on the subway. And it takes them almost 3 hours to make the trip one way. How does she know when to get off the subway? She puts 8 LifeSavers in her right pocket. Every time the subway makes a stop, she takes one of the LifeSavers out and puts it in her left pocket. When all the LifeSavers are gone, she gets out at the next stop.

She said that there aren't many places she can go by herself and feel 100% safe, but at Yankee Stadium, she feels like she is home. The community of friends she has made over the years is there waiting for her and when she arrives, they greet her with hugs and kisses. She said that at first she was scared to death to make the trek, but now she loves the trip because she knows what's at the end. She is happy to be able to get to the stadium, and happy to 'watch' her team play. She sees them with her heart.

Our lessons today are about blindness, about how we see, about darkness and light.

In the first book of Samuel, God is angry with King Saul and decides that another

king must be found. So God tells Samuel to go find Jesse, a man from Bethlehem, and pick one of his sons to be the new king. When he finds Jesse and the boys, he begins to look them over. God tells Samuel as each one passes by that that son is not the one, because, as God says, "Looks aren't everything. Don't be impressed with his looks and stature. I've already eliminated him. God judges persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; God looks into the heart." The son who is chosen in the end was left out in the field to tend the sheep because his father thought since he was the runt, he was not worth considering. He became King David.

I never hear that line in the Samuel story without thinking of the book, *The Little Prince*. When I was in high school, we read it in French class. In it, the narrator tells of being stranded in the Sahara Desert, thousands of kilometers away from inhabited places, where he meets a young extraterrestrial (though entirely human-looking) prince. The prince has travelled far from his home, which is an asteroid - and has visited several other asteroids and planets before he arrives at planet Earth. In the conversations between the prince and those he meets, some of the simple truths about human nature are revealed.

My French teacher loved that book with a passion! She was very sentimental about it. In fact, she loved it so much, that she told us that the motto for the French Club would be a quote from the book. The line - declared to the prince by a fox he has met and tamed - is the essence of the book: "One sees well only with the heart; what is essential is invisible to the eyes."

Perhaps the author of *The Little Prince* read the first book of Samuel.

When the man born blind had been healed by Jesus, the disciples, his neighbors,

the Pharisees - even his parents - asked lots of questions: Is this not the man who used to sit and beg? Then how were your eyes opened? Where did the man go? How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs? What do you say about him? Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see? What did the man do to you? How did he open your eyes?

They were questions of interest, of course - most of us would want to know the how, where and why. But those questions were asked primarily to be able to point fingers at those who had sinned: the one who had sinned and therefore was born blind and the one who had healed on the Sabbath, the one who had claimed to come from God, the one who dared to declare himself the Son of Man.

No one really asked very many of these questions to the man who could now see. Instead, they asked each other and his parents, as if he was unable to answer for himself. In fact, they continued to act as if he were invisible - like he was when he was blind, begging on the street, and being ignored as if he wasn't really there. He had always been and continued to be someone who was insignificant to the world. So insignificant that they didn't even bother to ask questions like: what is it like to be able to see for the first time, or does the light hurt your eyes. And not one soul said, "Praise God! This man has been healed!"

One of the best things we can do during this time of Lent, or in any other season for that matter, is to ask the questions, of ourselves and others, that enable our vision to grow instead of becoming narrower - questions that change the way we see from our eyes to our heart. Good questions embody something of a ritual within them, a sense of the sacramental: asking them accomplishes for us what the act of washing in the pool of Siloam did for the man with mud in his eyes. Good questions wash out our eyes and open

our hearts. They help us practice seeing differently. They widen and deepen our vision. Like the questions of our Baptismal Covenant such as "Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?" - like questions such as "Who is my neighbor?" and "How then shall we live?" - they shed light on our assessment of our lives - what we do to serve Christ, how we spread the light and what we can do to be better.

No matter where we are sent, what we are sent for is plain and simple: we are sent out to manifest God's love to the world, to live as children of light as the letter to the Ephesians says. To do that, our sight must be clear - not blinded with our myopic prejudices, biases, and even hatred toward those who look, act or think differently from us. If we are going to be more than surface Christians, more than people who only halfheartedly commit to answering the call, we must learn to see as God sees. To see as God sees is to see the light, to live in the light - to be the light to the poor, the hungry, the homeless, and the sick who are our neighbors, who are in fact, the world.

Today, let us commit ourselves to washing the mud from our eyes, so that, like the blind man in the gospel, we can say, "One thing I know - I was blind, but now I see."