

Sunglasses at Night
Fourth Sunday in Lent—Year A
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI
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Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.

A quirk of growing up in a rural area like I did is that a person could apply and get a driver's permit at age fourteen. This, naturally, is insane (do we have any 14 year olds in the house?). Still, that was the law of the land when I grew up, so sure enough, I took the test and was able to drive as long as there was a licensed adult over 21 in the car.

Around this same age, I had used all my allowance money for two months to buy a pair of really fantastic designer sun glasses. In hindsight, it seems silly, but at the time, I thought these were the coolest set of eyewear anywhere in the country. They had their own cloth case, and I kept them protected at all time so that I could maintain my scratch-free coolness.

(You might wonder what my driver's permit and these designer sunglasses have to do with one another. These two pieces of my life came together rather dramatically one evening when I almost ran me and my dad off the road.)

We were on a long road trip across the country, and I was taking my shift driving the mini-van and towing our family camper. I'd been driving for a few hours, looking very cool, I'm sure, behind the wheel in my killer shades. As we approached our turnoff, my dad indicated that we should reduce speed and follow the exit sign. I was having a hard time following the direction and, at one point, my dad actually grabbed the wheel to correct it since I was pointing us right into a ditch.

It turns out, I had been wearing my sunglasses and hadn't realized that the sun had set and I could barely see anything. As you may imagine, I wasn't allowed to drive for the rest of the trip, and I did not see those sunglasses for several weeks.

Before I do too much more talking about blindness, I want to note that in Jesus's time, it was common to associate being blind, being deaf, having a physical impairment with a person or a family's sin. That's nonsense, of course. Nonetheless, these stories are in our scripture and we must interact with them. So, please know, when we talk about blindness, we're playing with a powerful metaphor—though it might be just as helpful to think about having one's eyes closed then opened; being in a dark room and having a light turned on; watching the sun rise on a situation—pick your dark vs. light metaphor, and we'll run with it together.

In today's Gospel, a man who was born blind was given the gift of sight by Jesus. Jesus transgresses all kinds of rules to come to the aid of this man. Jesus heals on the Sabbath; Jesus

consorts with a man who is ritually unclean; Jesus circumvents the entire religious establishment and goes directly to the man in need.

What in your life right now seems dark? What in this community is cloudy or difficult to make out? What rules do you need to transgress today? Or, put another way, are there times or places in your life where you are wearing your sunglasses at night time and are having a hard time seeing the signs?

My guess is yes. I have yet to meet a human being who is so saintly that she has no need of God's illumination in one way or another.

I know that there have been some times lately when I have read some reports from eyewitnesses in our city about some of the poverty, the hunger, the disparity, the violence that exist not very many miles from where we're worshipping this morning. Whenever I read something about the suffering of my neighbors in this city, I do feel like God is trying to rip the sunglasses off me.

When I see something in our parish community that is keeping our doors shut or keeping us from welcoming our neighbors into the church as fully as we ought to, I can feel like God is trying to rip those sunglasses off.

Perhaps you have something like that in your life right now. Perhaps there is a place where you feel blind, or a situation that seems treacherous to navigate.

God's desire for us is to see. God is in the business of opening eyes, curing blindness, yanking sunglasses off your face when you need to see a sign. It is God's delight to brighten your understanding of God.

Our Lenten observances have been powerful for me, and I hope they have been for you as well. We have heard the great stories leading up to the Passion of Jesus proclaimed here by talented men and women. Our Wednesday night Eucharists have been full and worshipful. The Thursday night study sessions and Compline services have drawn quite a crowd, looking for inspiration and a closer walk with God. Yesterday's silent retreat brought prayer and understanding into this beautiful sanctuary.

I believe all these spiritual practices that come in the season of Lent are our way of asking Jesus to fix our eyes—to apply the mud to our eyelids so that we can see the world as it is. When Christ gives us the eyes we need—we begin to see each other as holy, we begin to see others as holy; we realize that the suffering of the other is our own suffering. And we start to see in a significant way the plan that God has for this world—peace, reconciliation, compassion, mercy. These are the antidotes to blindness that our benevolent God grants to us.

Vanity kept my sunglasses on my face hours after I should have taken them off. I had a good father who was good enough to shock me out of my mistake. May it be to all of us in our lives that God helps us to see what is necessary for the salvation of the world. Amen.

