

You will open the eyes of the blind

Isaiah 42:1-9

January 9, 2011

You will open the eyes of the blind ...

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine opening the eyes of someone who has never before seen anything? Opening her eyes for the first time to see the wonder of color and shape and movement, the wonder of light in all its variations of intensity and texture and warmth, the wonder of seeing things in perspective, in depth, in three dimensions, seeing things up close and things far away, at the same time, in relationship to each other?

Can you imagine opening her eyes to see faces, to see for the first time the faces of the people around her, communicating to her without words?

Can you imagine opening her eyes to see for the first time her own face, to know herself, not just from the inside, but from the outside too, to recognize and appreciate beauty, the beauty God has put into her face?

What a blessing for her, to be able to see the world as it is in all its glory! And what a blessing, what a privilege, for the one who opens her eyes!

Who is it? Who is it who will open the eyes of the blind? Listen!

(Read the scripture lesson: Isaiah 42:1-9)

Who is it? Who will open the eyes of the blind?

The Lord's servant ...

The Lord God says to his servant,

*I, the Lord, have called you and given you power
to see that justice is done on earth.*

*Through you I will make a covenant with all peoples;
through you I will bring light to the nations.*

You will open the eyes of the blind ...

... you, my servant, whom I strengthen --

the one I have chosen, with whom I am pleased.

The one who will open the eyes of the blind is the Lord's servant.

But who is the Lord's servant, the one the Lord has chosen, the one with whom the Lord is pleased?

I know what you want to say. I know what I want to say. But we can't, at least not yet. It's not Jesus. It can't be Jesus, because Isaiah could not have had Jesus in mind, and God would not have given a word to his people through his prophet that meant nothing to them where they were, as they were.

So who is the Lord's servant?

When you read more of the servant songs from the prophecies of Isaiah, the identity of the Lord's servant becomes clear. The Lord's servant is Israel, the people the Lord has called to be his own, the people the Lord has called to be a servant people. God chooses them, this particular group of human beings, for a special task, and that task is to bring justice, to bring justice to every nation.

God created the heavens and fashioned the earth and gave life and breath to all its people. And now God chooses a servant, a servant people, to see that justice is done on the earth.

What does God want? Justice. God wants justice among all the nations.

And how will God bring this justice into being? Through his chosen servant, through his chosen people, the people God fills with his Spirit.

This is Israel's task: to fulfill God's purpose by bringing justice to every nation. And how will Israel accomplish this task? Not by violence or demagoguery! Not with shouting or loud speeches. Not even breaking off the top of a reed that is already bent over. Not even extinguishing a lamp that is already flickering as it runs dry of oil.

The Lord's servant will not win justice by violence or by loud political protest. Which is news to us, because in our world, the struggle for justice usually involves the one thing or the other: either violence -- revolution, resistance, wars of liberation, or loud political protest -- demonstrations or media campaigns or angry speechmaking.

The Lord's servant will bring justice slowly, gently, patiently, carefully. Never losing hope, even when there is good reason to lose hope because justice is long in coming! Never losing courage, even when there is good reason to lose courage because there is so much opposition to justice!

Israel, the Lord's servant, will bring justice by bringing light, by opening eyes, by letting things be seen as they are, as they really are, as God has made them to be. Bringing justice means bringing light, and bringing light means seeing God, and seeing God means making covenant with God, and making covenant with God means walking in God's way. So justice means walking in God's way.

This is how Israel will fulfill God's purpose: by walking in God's way themselves, and by teaching others to walk in God's way. This is how Israel will fulfill God's purpose for all nations. This is how Israel will open the eyes of the blind.

This is how Jesus will open the eyes of the blind!

Yes, we do want to talk about Jesus now! Isaiah was not talking about Jesus, but we want to talk about Jesus, because Jesus does fulfill the purposes of which Isaiah spoke. This is how fulfillment works, not forwards, but backwards. When the people who witnessed Jesus' death and resurrection saw what God was doing through him, when they saw what God was doing in them through him, when they saw what God was doing in the world through him, they understood. They understood that Jesus was doing the work of the Lord's servant. Jesus was fulfilling the servant's task of bringing justice to all the earth.

Jesus was the one chosen by God and strengthened by God and filled with God's Spirit. Jesus was the one in whom God was well pleased. Jesus was the human being through whom God would bring justice to every nation.

And Jesus was doing it in the way Isaiah said it would be done, in the way God wills it to be done. Not with violence, but with gentleness. Not by gathering an army, but by making disciples. Not by making public speeches or forming a new political party, but by touching and healing and bringing light and setting things right one by one by one by one.

Jesus is the one who will see that justice is done. Jesus is the one through whom God will make covenant with all peoples. Jesus is the one through whom God will bring light to the world. Jesus is the one who will open the eyes of the blind.

And how will Jesus do it? Through you! Through us! We are Christ's body!

This is more than an image, more than a metaphor. We are Christ's body. We are the present embodiment of Christ in this world. We are the Lord's servant. We are the human beings, the people chosen by God, to bring justice to every nation.

God's purpose has not changed. God's desire is justice, justice for all the world and its people, justice for all to which God has given life. The task God gave Israel, once and forever, the task God gave Jesus, once and forever, is the task God now gives to us too, now and forever. It is still Israel's task. It is still Jesus' task. And now it is our task, too, to bring justice.

How? You know how! Not by violence! Not by force of any kind! Not by any means that breaks a injured reed or puts out a dying lamp! We bring justice by bringing light, by opening eyes, by letting things be seen as they are, as they really are, as God has made them to be. We will open the eyes of the blind.

We will open the eyes of the blind. What a blessing, what a privilege, to be the ones who open the eyes of the blind!

But what if they don't want to see?

What if they don't want to see the world as it is or see themselves as they are? What if they prefer to remain in the dark? What if the truth hurts?

What if they don't want to see the injustice that is there, the injustice that is here among us?

What if they don't want to see their neighbor hurting and needy, needing them?

What if they don't want to see themselves as a few among many, all precious in God's sight, but want to see themselves instead as a privileged few?

What if they don't want to see the pain, the violence, the suffering, the poverty, the unfairness, the discrimination, the intolerance?

Is it still a blessing, still a privilege, to be the ones who open the eyes of the blind? God be praised, it is! It is a privilege to be the Lord's servant. It is a blessing to follow Jesus in bringing light into the world. But know that this blessing comes with suffering too, just as it did for Jesus. The Lord's servant is a suffering servant, because injustice has a stake in keeping justice at bay, and darkness has a stake in keeping out the light.

So we too must work slowly, gently, patiently, carefully, never losing hope, never losing courage. And we must remember that before we may hope to open the eyes of the blind, Jesus must first open our eyes.

You will open the eyes of the blind ...

This will be our theme for the season of Epiphany that begins this Sunday. This Sunday and during the next eight Sundays of Epiphany, we will do our best to let God's light shine into our hearts and our minds through the words of the prophet Isaiah and the words of Jesus, opening our eyes and curing our blindness, so we too may take up the task of bringing light into this world.

But I will warn you! It will take courage to listen. It will take courage to let our eyes be opened, for there will be some challenges and some surprises along the way!