

Sermon for March 22, 2020

1 Samuel 16:1-13;
Psalm 23;
Ephesians 5:8-14;
John 9:1-41

“Hope”

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer! Amen.

Please be seated.

Most of us are familiar with TV detective dramas. My memories go way back to the 50s, to the days of Dragnet: “Just the facts Ma’am!” Sergeant Joe Friday would intone in every week’s episode. More recently there was Kojak, he with the shiny dome and the ever present lollipop. “Who loves ya, baby?” And of course, who could forget Lieutenant Columbo with his dishevelled raincoat and rusty Peugeot car finishing an interview with a suspect and then quickly turning around and saying, “Oh, just one more thing...”

Many of these dramas would include a scenario which has the accused quivering in the interview room at the police station and a big, burly cop hovering over him saying something like, “We’ve got you to rights, buddy. The evidence is all over you. You’re going down!” Then a mousy, little cop would replace his big partner and carry on: “Wouldn’t you feel a whole lot better if you got your guilt off your chest? Just confess now and we’ll do what we can...” The old, good cop, bad cop routine. Asking the accused the same questions over and over again to try to catch him out.

That must have been what the man born blind felt like with Pharisee after Pharisee pummeling him with the same questions time after time after time. And he wasn’t even the accused. But they sure treated him like he was. Or, maybe he really was an accused. Fancy allowing himself to be healed on the Sabbath! He should have known better! Honestly! Rules are rules, after all.

But, in spite of the distressing things that can happen in police interview rooms and elsewhere, and despite what’s going on in our world right now with viruses and wars and the rest, I want to bring you a message of hope this morning.

God sent Samuel to choose the next king of Israel. King Saul just didn’t measure up. Wasn’t up to snuff. Samuel was directed to the appropriate family to choose from a klatch of sons. He even brought the anointing oil along with him. But God rejected the sons one after the other until he came to the least likely one of all (in human eyes at least). Because he was the least likely one, he wasn’t even there for the ceremony. They had to send for him as he was away tending sheep in a distant field. God chose David. And Samuel anointed him king. Now we know that David was not the perfect king. We have the example of what he did to have Bathsheba as his own, by effectively having her husband Uriah killed in battle. But like many imperfect men, like Jean Vanier, even in the era of #me too, David did great things for the kingdom of Israel.

One of the greatest things David ever did was to write many of the psalms that we are familiar with today, even the one we heard and sang this morning:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

These are words of comfort and solace that have been recited in many languages for many thousands of years and, obviously, have special meaning for our own Parish because of our name: Good Shepherd. My apologies to all you modern folks. I prefer the rhythm and cadence of the King James Version.

So, if there was hope for David – and there was, there is hope for us as well.

In a prayer written by theologian and Trappist Monk Thomas Merton that Jennifer read in a recent Wednesday evening Lenten gathering, there are words relating to this favourite psalm:

My Lord God,

I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

nor do I really know myself,

and the fact that I think I am following your will

does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you

does in fact please you.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,

though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always though

I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear, for you are ever with me,

and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

There's more hope.

And Paul, he who from time to time mimics the bad cop, giving firm instructions to the churches that he has founded, who says to us this morning:

“Wake up sleeper. Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Wake up, not just because we've changed our clocks to spring forward... Wake up to new life and new possibilities. Maybe new challenges, but new hope as well. Words of inspiration, and hope from Paul.

And, what about the man born blind? The man born blind can now see. That's something that then, and now, doesn't happen all that often. And despite the pettifogging imprecations of the Pharisees, going from blindness to seeing in a real or in a metaphorical sense is a good thing no matter on what day it happens. Who is so truly blind that they cannot see that seeing is a good thing? And all of this begs the question: what is more important – rules or goodness? The Pharisees apparently couldn't care less that the man who was blind can now see. That he was miraculously healed. They were only concerned about compliance with their many different picayune rules. So, they can question him as much as they like. But they can't take away his newly found sight! There's more hope.

We've noted that God chose David, the most unlikely son in his family, to be the king of Israel. We should also remember that in bringing him to earth, God caused God's own son to be born in the most unlikely of circumstances given that he was the son of God. This is the well from which springs the best and the most hope for all of us. No matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, there is always hope. The examples we've looked at this morning tell us that in spades.

Amen.