

“Perceive and Believe”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
March 19, 2023 - Fourth Sunday in Lent

[1 Samuel 16:1-13; John 9:1-17, 24-25, 32-41](#)

Seeing is believing. Or is it? Sometimes there are things that we may see or hear or sense in some other way, but we can't trust what it is that we are perceiving. So if you saw David Copperfield walking through the Great Wall of China or making the Statue of Liberty disappear, or if you see another illusionist perform something designed to trick the senses, perhaps seeing this “magic” shouldn't lead to believing that what you see is real. The same could be said of a person who ingests “magic” mushrooms, LSD, or some other hallucinogenic substance, which leads a person to really sense all sorts of things that are not at all real.

But there are many things in this life, when we see or otherwise sense them, that can lead us to gain new insight or grow in faith. The man born blind of today's gospel reading from John gives us an excellent example of this. Though he had no sight from the time of his birth, he gained sight after Jesus healed him, and with his sight, he gained insight, seeing that Jesus was God's agent of deliverance, the divine Son of Man, and this insight led the man to believe and to worship Jesus.

But seeing did not lead to believing for some other characters in today's lesson. A group of Pharisees, who were religious leaders located primarily in synagogues and who were very concerned about teaching and enforcing not only the Law of Moses, but their many additional religious laws and traditions, saw that the man had been healed, and they should have recognized in this miraculous sign the wonderful grace of God upon this man, who was once blind, but now could see, but that was not their reaction at all. What they saw in the healing was not an act of grace to be celebrated, but a despicable breach of their rules as this healing happened on the Sabbath. Because it was on this special day of rest that Jesus dared to do the work of making mud and wiping it on the man's eyes, Jesus was branded by the Pharisees not as a heaven-sent worker of miracles and giver of blessings, but as a rule-breaking sinner. Though seeing a miracle, the Pharisees were blinded by their own outrage, and they could not perceive the goodness of what was in front of their own eyes; for them, seeing was not believing.

And what about for those of us gathered here on this Sunday. Are we able to see God's miraculous work in our lives and in our world? Can we celebrate when we witness the unbound grace of God being poured out upon people, even when that grace defies our limiting expectations or limited understanding? And will the signs of God's gracious provision lead us to grow in faith, abound in hope, and find more of God's peace dwelling in our hearts?

As we begin a new spring season tomorrow at 5:23 p.m., I hope that we are all able to begin a new season in our hearts in which we pay closer attention to God's healing work and miracles of newness springing up all around us. No matter how many seasons you've already experienced in your life, and how many of those have been cold, dark winters, I hope that you can perceive God at work in your life now, performing new miracle upon new miracle. I hope that you sense God's life growing within you and producing something good that brings more beauty to the world, like the flowers that are now beginning to pop out of the ground, blessing us with their joy-inspiring colors. And I hope that you can see God's miraculous work throughout the world as God breaks anew into our broken existence and breaks our many rules that constrain people and keep them from flourishing and enjoying life as God intends.

When you do see God's amazing grace upon your life and in the world, give thanks and praise to the giver of life and love. Perceive and believe that God has something even greater and more vibrantly colorful in store for us and our children tomorrow and in all the seasons to come. And let us ever be about God's work of healing and renewal in the world, that we would be used by God to bless one another and the generations to come. Amen.