

**15<sup>th</sup> March 2026, Matins**

**1 Samuel 16:1-13, John 9**

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Good Morning, St Mary Abbots. It is good to be with you here on this Mothering Sunday. I bring you greetings from New York — where our winter has been cold and snowy. And the actions of our country have grown more troubling. Nevertheless, we persist.

As your preacher this morning, I have to tell you that there's a lot going on in the Gospel, and I've had to resist the urge to try and explain it. But there are these points that are so very interesting. Like in the beginning — the very first line where it says, "*As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.*"

This is different than the narratives we often hear where people come to Jesus to be healed or touch the hem of his garment. Instead, we have the opposite. It is Jesus who sees someone who cannot see him and makes the move to heal him. We could also talk about the fact that it's not the Pharisees but the disciples who question whether this man is blind as the result of something he or his parents have done — a throw back to the Hebrew Bible and an understanding that the judgment of the father is visited on the child. This is reasoning that has us believe that our circumstances are related to God's judgment of our actions, though we know that's not how God's love works.

But what I've come to understand — once we set aside the ableist notions within this Gospel and its emphasis on seeing is that this story is really a conversion experience. That it is through the story of a man who is born blind — and whose vision is revealed or restored — that we may come to know something about Jesus. About who he is and how he views the world. And about how we're all meant to see.

Because that's the point, isn't it? Through the consideration of the disciples statement which Jesus refutes. And the extended questioning by the Pharisees who cannot accept that Jesus has shown up in the world doing things he is not meant to do. And claiming things he can't possibly claim. The Pharisees want details. They want the man who has been changed to explain what has happened. But all he can attest to is that it happened.

This is what makes it a conversion story — that there's a before and an after. Two states that are radically different — and in between, the unfolding of a mystery that doesn't make much sense. The man whose sight was restored is brought before the Pharisees, but all he is able to explain is: "*I was blind, but now I can see.*"

This is deeply unsatisfactory to those who want to find fault with Jesus' actions. So they call for him a second time. And this time, he still has no words for the how — but he recognizes that his very life has become a testimony to the what. *"Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind,"* he says. *"If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."* I suspect that we all have heard conversion stories, and perhaps some have had them, too.

There are those moments when God's presence in our lives becomes crystal clear. Or when we see the hand of God working in our lives. They can be moments that bring us to faith or reinforce it. We often think of them as flashes — a before and after in time that leaves us transformed. Our own burning bush.

But sometimes we get so focused on looking for the big bang that we might miss the way a steady drip of water eats away at impermeable, immovable stone. Even if conversion doesn't always look like we think it ought to — the opportunity for it remains present for each of us. We, too, are called to be converted, and that opportunity exists in both the miraculous and the mundane. It exists in our every day encounters as we are called to open our eyes and our hearts and our minds to be the people God calls us to be.

Perhaps we think conversion is only meant for others. For those more evangelical. For those more expressive. For those who don't need the structure of the book of common prayer. And why would we need to be converted when we're already people of faith?

But the reason we read this Gospel during the season of Lent — the entire 9th chapter from John's Book of Signs — is the invitation it carries for us to enter into a renewed relationship with God and with each other. We may not know the *how* — but the season of Lent invites us to surrender to the *what*. It is a call to allow God to wash away that which clouds our vision and remove the barriers between us and God's creation, so we might see the world in all the diversity with which God made both it and us, and celebrate it all.

If Lent is the chance to examine our relationship with God by examining our relationship with each other, then the opportunity for conversion is the invitation to remove the scales from our eyes and live into God's grace and love — a love so broad and deep and wide that to truly engage it is a chance for transformation.

Before and after. May each of us be forever changed by that unexplainable middle. *I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see (sung).* **Amen**