

The Rev. Dr. Sandi Kerner

We have all kinds of seeing going on in today's gospel passage, and maybe the reason I noticed it was all about seeing that. I saw that it's because I've had trouble seeing these past two weeks. Monday, two weeks ago, I woke up with a stabbing pain in my right eye. It was all swollen and red and extremely sensitive to light.

Teary. But I soldiered through Monday, thinking, well, by Tuesday it will be better after I sleep. It was no better. It was worse, in fact. And so I came to work that day. I came to a staff meeting and I pulled Doctor Paula aside. Not no Nurse Paula. But anyway, Nurse Paula recommended her eye doctor to me and off I went.

And the diagnosis was I was suffering from an eye abrasion on my cornea caused by my contact lenses. They were, a pair that were given to me to tide me over until my real, prescription. And, the usual brand I use came in, but it wasn't working very well with my eye. And so the prescription from the doctor was lots of eye drops and no contact lenses.

Wear your glasses. And I can confess to you that I'm rather vain. I don't like wearing my glasses. So I wore my glasses for nearly two weeks. I'm much better now, but it was interesting. I couldn't even read the top line on the chart with my right eye. It was pretty bad and it made me so aware of how critical seeing is for living life to the fullest.

I have a new empathy for those who sight is challenged in some way, and those who live with pain that just pierces and sucks the life out of you. I get that to some degree now, but our gospel today is all about seeing. It's about physically seeing, but it's also about this kind of inner sight in sight seeing, prophetically seeing with the eyes of God a sight that comes from divine revelation.

God opening the eyes of our hearts and minds to see into the unseen, real. To see what's really going on from God's perspective. Much of the time, I confess I don't see that way. My sight is challenged in that way for sure. In our gospel reading today, John the Baptizer comes on the

scene and he physically sees Jesus coming toward him as he is baptizing people in the Jordan River.

He's baptizing, as we talked about last week, a baptism of repentance to which he's calling God's people to make ready the way of the Lord to prepare for the Messiah who is coming to reveal Jesus and who he really is. And all kinds of people are coming out to John in the wilderness to be baptized by him, to prepare the way of the Lord.

John doesn't give us the blow by blow description of this baptism. He just tells us. He narrates from what he saw as an eyewitness. And he said, I saw, I saw the Holy Spirit descend from heaven and remain on Jesus. That's an extraordinary manifestation of the Holy Spirit, not just to descend as a dove, as the other gospel writers say, but John makes a point of saying the spirit remains on Jesus.

Such an important word it means to stay, to remain, to abide, to inhabit, even. And while John sees all this with his physical eyes, he also receives a powerful insight a divine revelation, a prophetic word, and he announces it to everybody who's standing there with him. He says, behold, I see with new eyes here is the Lamb of God.

He's pointing to Jesus. Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We know Jesus is not coming for baptism because he needs to repent. Here's the sinless, unblemished, spotless lamb who is taking away the sin of the world once for all and twice. John the Baptizer introduces Jesus as the Lamb of God to his own followers.

And it's so curious. In the very next chapter in John's gospel, he will tell us that Jesus is going up to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. That's the time where the people of God remember and celebrate their deliverance from being slaves in Egypt. When the angel of death, back in those days, passed over the homes of the Israelites because the blood of the sacrificial lamb, the Passover lamb, was put upon their lintels and their doorposts, and the angel of death passed over them, making way for their deliverance from Egypt.

It could be that at the very hour of Jesus baptism in the Jordan, as John the Baptizer was introducing Jesus as the Lamb of God to his disciples, that lambs for the Passover feast were being herded right by to go up to Jerusalem again, for their blood to be shed so that God's people could be delivered. But here in Jesus is the blood of the Lamb of God, delivering us from all sin and sickness and death, taking away, lifting off, carrying away the sin of the world once and for all and for all time.

And don't we, in our service of Holy Communion, every week hear these words Christ, our Passover is sacrificed for us. And what do we respond? Therefore, let us keep the feast. Indeed, here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He removes it once for all by his blood poured out for us on the cross.

It's by his wounds that we are healed, and we've already been forgiven 100%. We are cleansed. Cleansed from the stain of sin, from the guilt that nags us. It's removed. Delivered from shame that in shrouds us and binds us. It's lifted off and carried away from the sting of self-hatred in that hamster wheel of self-condemnation that we go round and round with, in our minds and in traps us.

Because, brothers and sisters, everything is brought out into the light. Don't we say all hearts are open, all desires known. There's no hidden secrets to God. We are known. We are fully seen. We are cleansed and old wounds are healed. Behold, he says to us today, see in a new way Jesus is here today by the power of His Spirit.

In this Passover feast, his blood poured out for you, that you might see a new. How loved you are, that you are set free to live in a new way. And don't miss the other piece of John the Baptizer eyewitness. I saw the spirit descending from heaven like a dove and remained on him again. John not only physically sees a dove descend on Jesus at his baptism, but he also sees that the spirit remains on Jesus.

John has already heard this from the father, saying to him, the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, he on whom you see the spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. That's extraordinary that the spirit would remain, because in Old Testament

times the spirit came down to anoint, to empower, to help certain people at certain times in particular ways, for God's purpose.

But here the spirit comes down to remain, to stay with, to inhabit, to abide with. And here is Jesus being empowered by the Holy Spirit. Yes, he's the Son of God, but yes, he also emptied himself, and now he's being filled with the Holy Spirit, baptized, saturated, immersed every fiber in God's power and God's love. Yes, John says he's uniquely the Son of God, and yet he needed that baptism to begin his earthly ministry.

And God's good news for us in this, brothers and sisters, is that Jesus is now the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And we receive that same spirit, that same baptism of the spirit. We are immersed every fiber of our being with the Spirit of God. We receive the Holy Spirit. We receive the giver of all the gifts, all the gifts of wisdom and knowledge and understanding and discernment, all the gifts of prayer and seeing Scripture with new eyes.

Because the spirit enlivens us. Gifts of healing, gifts of prophecy, gifts of praying in tongues. All those gifts are available to us. We are filled with the Holy Spirit, and in fact, we are commanded in Luke's Gospel to ask, to seek, to knock, to ask for the Holy Spirit. And Jesus assures us that the father gives to all who ask, no exceptions.

So Jesus is here today in the power of His Spirit to baptize you and me again with the Holy Spirit, so that we're saturated with the love of God and the power of God, that we might see a new how beloved we are, that we are set free to live in a new way, that the gifts of God might be revealed through your life in the world, to a world that so desperately needs to know the good news of God's power to save and to heal and to deliver and to set free.

To forgive God's power to make all things new.

And John the Baptizer points to the Lamb of God for those disciples. And he points us to Jesus to. And as we are following Jesus as his disciples, Jesus turns toward us as he did to those first disciples. He sees us. He sees into us. He sees us who we really are, but has divine revelation. And he says to each of us tenderly, what are you looking for?

Who are you looking for? What are you seeking? What do you want? These are his first words spoken in this gospel and we reply to Jesus, where are you staying? And he responds back. Simply come and see. He doesn't give us an address, but he gives us an invitation to walk with him and to stay with him. And when Jesus meets Andrew's brother Simon, he looks at him and he sees Simon, but he sees him prophetically as well.

And he says, you are Simon, son of John.

The name Simon means God listens. God hears. It also means one who is flat nosed. But we won't go into that today. But he says, you will be called Peter, meaning a stone or a rock. And we know from reading the gospel Simon was anything but a rock. In the early years of Jesus ministry. He was eager, he was impetuous.

He was suffering from what I call foot and mouth disease.

And he even denied Jesus at the very end, and yet forgiven and healed and restored by Jesus after the resurrection. He's called forth to be a shepherd, to care for Jesus lambs in his flock, given an extended ministry, and then on the day of Pentecost, he's filled, baptized with the Holy Spirit, and he goes out to be a bold witness and a rock for the church.

And eventually he is martyred for what he believes, what he stands for. And so Jesus sees and calls forth that true person, that true self, that person in each of us cleansing and forgiving our sin, empowering us by the spirit and calling us forth to be a new creation.

There's a story I want to close with, the story of one man I know who experienced that. My late husband, Bob, had been a priest for a number of years in the church in the Roman Catholic Church. I told you I'd tell you that story someday. Well, we'll get there eventually. But he was working in other ministries at the point after we were married, and he started being a teacher.

Think about this. Sixth graders. Anybody remember sixth grade? Oh, yeah. I don't want to go back there for sure. He was teaching sixth graders. He was trying to teach them geography and history. They were not interested. Bob loved geography and history, and he became he tried his best to be a teacher, but he couldn't do it. And after the first semester he was let go.

You can no longer be a priest. Function as a priest. He could no longer teach in a school. He had no really earthly purpose. And he got very depressed, very dejected.

And so he went for prayer because he was so in the depths of just struggling and struggling. And as people prayed with him, one particular woman said to him, Bob, I see the word failure written all over you. That's what you've accepted as to who you are. You're you think of yourself as a failure. And she said, as I prayed for you, what I saw was Jesus with a big eraser.

And he took that eraser and he raced it, raced that word failure off of you, off of your heart, off of your mind. And he wants to write in his new name for you how he sees you prophetically. And so we waited and we listened. And I watched my husband's head go from down here to up here and he looked up and he said, he calls me chosen.

He says, you're not a failure. You are my son. I see you and you're a teacher of my word, and you are found faithful and I delight in you. God gave him that day new eyes to see himself, but also his calling and what he would call him too eventually. So the question I hear for all of us today is, what are you looking for?

Jesus turns to you and to me and says, what are you looking for? Do you need forgiveness? Do you need to know that all of that is cleansed? Do you need more of the Holy Spirit in your life to be God's hands and God's feet in this world, to care for people, to do what you're called to do, to receive all the gifts of the Holy Spirit and manifest them in your life.

Do you need to hear a new name and have that name erased? That old name, those old labels that we tell ourselves who we are and do you need to listen as you come and receive Holy Communion this day, and go back and are seated. Listen for that new name that God calls you. At the beginning of this year, I believe that's what the Lord wants to do in us and through us.

So, Holy Spirit, come and do that work in each of us today that we might know, were forgiven or loved, were set free, was filled with the spirit.

And let us hear the name that you have for us, Jesus. We pray this in your good and mighty name. Amen.