

The Rev. Dr. Sandi Kerner

There is all kinds of sin going on in our gospel passage today, and maybe the reason I noticed that there was so much seeing going on is because I've had trouble myself seeing the past two weeks. Monday, two weeks ago, I woke up with such a stabbing pain in my right eye, and I looked at it in the mirror and it was all swollen and teary and very sensitive to light.

I thought, what is wrong? So I soldiered through Monday, thinking it would get better, and once I sleep on it Monday night it will be better. But Tuesday morning I woke up. It was no better. In fact, it was worse. And so I came in for staff meeting that day, and I went immediately to Doctor Paula. Well, Nurse Paula, but she was my doctor right for that moment.

And she sent me to her eye doctor. And the diagnosis was that I was suffering from an eye abrasion on my cornea caused by my contact lenses. I had been given a brand to tide me over until my real ones came in, and it was an off brand that I didn't use, and apparently it had scratched my eye.

I can tell you it's painful. It really hurts. And so the prescription was lots of eye drops and no contact lenses. I couldn't even tolerate them anyway. But I have such pride. I hate wearing glasses. I confess I love my contact lenses. It's probably because my mother gave me pink glasses when I was a little girl in third grade, and I hated them.

I've hated them ever since.

And I even purchased a pair of those movie star wraparound dark sunglasses to wear so that the light wouldn't hurt it so bad. So I looked pretty cool for about a week anyway, but my sight was impaired to such a great degree over that week, I couldn't even read the top line in the eye chart.

And it made me so aware of how critical seeing is for living life to the fullest. Now that I have my sight back and I can pop my contact lenses in again, but I have a new empathy for those who sight is challenged in some way, and those who just live in pain that pierces you and sucks the life out of you.

Many of you know what I'm talking about. It's hard, but our gospel today is all about seeing. Yes, it's about physical seeing, but it's also about that kind of inner sight, the seeing prophetically, a sight that comes only from divine revelation of God opening the eyes of our heart and mind to see into the unseen real. What's really going on from God's perspective.

And I confess, much of the time my sight is impaired that way. I don't always see that way either. And so enter John the Baptist. He's physically seeing Jesus in our gospel today, coming toward him, walking towards him as he's baptizing in the Jordan River. He's baptizing with a baptism of repentance that we talked about last week, to which he's calling all of God's people to make ready the way of the Lord, to prepare for the Messiah, to come and to reveal who Jesus was, and all kinds of people, all manner of people are coming out to him in the wilderness, and they're coming for that spiritual cleansing.

They're plunged down into the Jordan River, that muddy, cold river, and they come up in there. They're cleansed from sin, and it's an outward and visible sign of an interior conversion of life. And even though John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, doesn't record the actual baptism of Jesus, he describes what he saw in his baptism as an eye witness.

He keeps saying, I myself to give credence to what he's talking about. And he says, there's this extraordinary manifestation that happens when Jesus is baptized. Yes, the Holy Spirit comes down upon him like a dove, just like the other gospel writers say. But then John adds this part. He says the spirit came down upon him and it remained on him.

And that's such an important word for John the Evangelist. He uses it so many times in his gospel. He talks about to stay, to remain, to abide, even to inhabit. And while he sees all this with his physical eyes, he's also receiving a powerful insight, a divine revelation, a prophetic word, and he announces it to everybody that's standing around.

He says, behold, see with new eyes. Look, here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now we know Jesus is not coming for baptism because he needs to repent. Here is 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 interesting. In the very next chapter of John, he talks about Jesus and the disciples going up to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. It's where the people of God remember and celebrate their deliverance from being slaves in Egypt. When the angel of death passed over their homes and the Israelites were freed, they were delivered from death, from death of their firstborn sons.

And it makes a way for their whole deliverance out of Egypt into freedom. And it could be, even at the very hour of Jesus baptism by John in the river Jordan. And as John the Baptizer is introducing, Jesus says, look, here's the Lamb of God, that in the backdrop there are many lambs being heard it up to Jerusalem for the Passover feast to be sacrificed, and their blood applied so that the sin could be forgiven.

And God's people would remember how God freed them with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. And here is Jesus with the blood of the Lamb of God, delivering us from sin and sickness and death, taking away, lifting off, carrying away the sin of the whole world once and for all and for all time. And in our service of Holy Communion.

Every week we hear these words Christ, our Passover is sacrificed for us, and we respond, therefore, let us keep the feast. Indeed, it is a feast. Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He removes it once for all by his blood. His blood shed on the cross for us, by his wounds as the lamb standing those slain, we are healed.

Yes, we've already been forgiven. Brothers and sisters were cleansed from the state of sin, from guilt that nags us. It's removed. We're delivered from shame that in shrouds and binds us. It's lifted off and carried away from the sting of self-hatred and the hamster wheel of self-condemnation that we loop through in our minds sometimes, don't we? Well, maybe I'm alone in that.

Maybe only I do that. But there is these things that just go round and round in our head, and we're set free, because everything is brought to light in Jesus, and it has no more power to entrap us. We are fully known, fully received, fully seen. As young people say today he sees me. He really does see us.

All hearts are open, all desires known. There's no more hidden secrets. We are cleansed. Our old wounds are healed. Behold, see in a new way. Jesus is here today by the power of His Spirit. In this Passover feast, his blood is poured out for you, that you might see a new how you are loved and how you are set free to live in a new way.

And don't miss the other piece of John the Baptizer. As I witness, he says, I saw the spirit descending from heaven like a dove and remaining on him again. John not only sees with his eyes, but he has this divine revelation that the spirit not only descends, but remains on Jesus. John's already heard God say to him, the one, the one that sent him 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 actually remain not come upon you for just certain things, certain times, and then almost like, go away. Though the spirit descends and remains and inhabits and fills us up to overflowing. And it's that spirit that speaks to us that we are God's children. Jesus is uniquely God's Son, but we are also God's children in Christ.

In that overwhelming, never ending, reckless love of God that Charlie talked about a few weeks ago. The good news for us is that Jesus, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, baptizes us with the Holy Spirit. As beloved children in Christ. We receive that same baptism with the Holy Spirit. We are immersed every fiber of our being in the love and power and presence of God.

And not only that, but Paul talks to the Corinthians today about you lack no spiritual gift. As you wait for the revealing, a full revealing of Jesus Christ. And so, two we are baptized in the spirit. We lack no gift. Brothers and sisters, we have gifts of wisdom and knowledge and understanding and discernment because we have the giver of all gifts in us, and we have gifts of prophecy and prayer, reading Scripture and having it come alive.

Gifts of healing, gifts of even praying in tongues. All those gifts of the spirit are ours. There is legacy in in fact, in Luke's Gospel, we're commanded to ask, to seek, to knock and ask for more of the Holy Spirit. And it says the father will always give the Holy Spirit to those who ask. No exceptions. And so we're here today in the power of the spirit, and God is here to baptize you with the Holy Spirit to fill you anew, to saturate you with the love and power of God that you might see with your eyes, but more see with your heart and knew how much you are loved, how much you are set

free to behave, to live life in different ways, and that the gifts of God might be revealed through you, manifested in you for the good of this world. Who needs it desperately to make all things new? And as John the Baptizer points us to the Lamb of God, we are like those disciples, like Andrew and his companion, who then turn and follow Jesus and notice that Jesus turns toward them.

He turns toward us, and he sees us not just physically sees us. He sees us through and through on the inside, sees us as his beloved children. And he says, I think tenderly to us, what are you looking for? What are you seeking? What do you want? These are the first words of Jesus that are spoken in this gospel.

It's a question that pierces our hearts and reveals our deepest longings. He seeks us out. He sees us and we reply along with those disciples, Jesus, where are you staying? Where are you remaining?

And he says to us, come and see. Come and see. He doesn't give an address. He gives an invitation to walk with him and to stay with him. And when Jesus meets Andrew's brother Simon, he sees down into his very soul, and he declares this prophetically. He says, you are Simon. Yes, son of John. That's your name. Simon means one who listens to God, one who hears God.

But the name Simon also means flat nosed. We won't go there today, though.

But he says to him, You're Simon, son of John. But you are to be called Peter, meaning stone or rock. If you know anything about Simon from the Gospels, you know that he was anything but a rock for a long time. He was eager. He was impetuous. He often suffered from what I called foot and mouth disease. He had a hard time staying true, and he denied Jesus at the very end.

And yet he's forgiven. He's healed. He's restored by Jesus after the resurrection and called the fullness of life and recalled to ministry, to feed the lambs, to tend the sheep. Jesus expanded his ministry, and at Pentecost he was baptized with the Holy Spirit, became such a bold witness, and later a martyr for the faith. A leader of the church.

And so Jesus sees and calls forth true life, the true person. In each one of us. He cleanses from sin, he forgives, he empowers us by the spirit, and he calls us forth to be that new creation out of our shame and out of our old wounds. And I want to close with a story. There is a time in our lives when, my husband was looking for a job.

He found one was after he was a Roman Catholic priest before he was received as an Episcopal priest. Again, I promised you that story. One of these days, we'll get there. It's a great story. Love story. But during that time, he had a hard time finding out what to do. And so he ended up teaching. He was invited to teach because he was a good teacher of the Bible.

He got a job teaching in sixth grade. Oh, yeah. Thank you. You get it? Anybody want to go back and be in sixth grade again? No. He loved geography and history so much. He was the best to Trivial Pursuit, geography and history. You could best him and he just wanted to instill that in these children. And these sixth graders didn't really care a whole lot about geography or history.

And so at the end of that first semester, he was invited to leave his position a failure. He failed as a teacher of sixth graders. And not only that, but he was dejected. He was struggling. He got depressed about what he was called to do when he couldn't be a priest yet, and he was just really struggling with everything.

And so we went for prayer ministry. When we went to our rector and his wife, and they prayed with us and the rector's wife, Gretzky looked at him. She said, after we prayed, she said as I

closed my eyes to pray what I saw was the word failure and it was written all across your heart, Bob, that you believe that you're a failure, that you're not good enough to do anything, that you're rejected, that you're abandoned by God and you're a failure.

And she said, but when I closed my eyes again, what I saw in prayer was a big giant eraser. And I took the took the eraser. Jesus took the eraser and erased the word failure that's written on you. And he wants to write in your new name, just like Simon got a new name. He wants to write in you your new name.

So just listen for what that is. So we listened for a few moments in prayer and my husband's head was down like this. He was just dejected, feeling all that failure inside. And as she said that, and as he began to pray, he popped his head up and he said, oh, he's writing the word chosen on me. Proud of you, my son.

My beloved. I see you. You're a teacher of my word. You're, You are found faithful. I delight in you. That's what I see him writing on me.

And he was different from that day on. He knew who he was and whose he was. And he went forth from there to do wonderful things after that. But God gave him new eyes to see who God is and to see who he is through God's eyes. So I say to you today, what are you looking for? What are you seeking for?

What are you longing for? Is it forgiveness? Is it release? Is it more of the Holy Spirit in your life? Is it for God to erase some label, some old name that you've taken on and to write in a new name as God sees you? So I pray today for your sight in mind that we would open the eyes of our heart, Jesus, open the eyes of our heart to see, to see how you see us, and to hear our new name.

To be filled with the spirit, to be forgiven, to be set free, to be empowered. Jesus. We ask this in your good and mighty name. Amen.

