

## **The Rev. Dr. Sandi Kerner**

I have to get the Billy serve any stance here, so give me a minute.

It's good to be with you tonight. I'm Sandy Carter. If you don't know me. I've been part of Saint Mark's now for about a month and a half on the staff. And one of the priests here, and then coming to the service because I love it so much. Can't miss it every week.

Our passage today is from the Gospel of John. And John has this amazing ability. He sees like an eagle sees. He flies high above all the other gospel writings. In a sense he sees from an eagle eye point of view. He gets down to the nitty gritty details of they met the disciples at 4:00 and they stayed there.

How would he know he was there? He heard an eyewitness, but also he sees from way above, and he sees not only with his eyes, his physical eyes, but he sees with divine revelation, with a prophetic eye. And he calls forth what is unseen, but what he sees and what God sees. From God's perspective. That's so true of our passage today.

In fact, our passage today is really all about seeing. And I think that came to me mostly because I've had trouble seeing this past two weeks. I had something two weeks ago on a Monday morning, I woke up in my I had stabbing pain, my right eye and tears were coming down and it was all swollen and red and I couldn't see out of it.

It's really frustrating. I thought, what is this? What's going on? I hope it's not conjunctivitis. Oh no, you know. And so, I came I kind of soldiered through Monday and I came to work on Tuesday and it was absolutely no better. It was worse. And so of course, I went up to Doctor Paula Fallon, while she's not a doctor, but I like to think of her as my doctor.

My first, my first defense. Anyway, in terms of medical stuff, I said, Powell, look at my eye, what's going on there? And she said, well, it could be conjunctivitis, but let me send you to my

eye doctor. So I went off to the eye doctor and what he saw as he looked at it was the cornea had an abrasion on it.

And he said, it's probably from your contact lenses that you wear. And I said, yeah, it probably is, because they gave me kind of a loaner pair for a few weeks until my new lenses come in, and it's an off brand and I never wear it. And I think it's been rubbing on my eye to the prescription the doctor gave me was a bunch of drops.

And do not wear your contact lenses. I thought, oh, I'm so vain. I hate wearing glasses. Okay, that's my confession to you tonight. So I used to sit on my glasses so I could break them. But that's a long story. I won't tell you. And so I've been wearing my glasses for two weeks now. I'm at least back in my contact lenses.

Hallelujah. Jesus. And my eyes healed. But that really sensitized me to what God was saying about this passage tonight. This passage from John where there's lots of seeing going on. John does not disappoint us from this eagerly point of view. It says this the next day, as he was baptizing in the River Jordan, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, behold, look, see, see with new eyes the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

John saw him with his physical eyes, but he also sees him with a divine revelation with a prophetic word. And he says, look, here is the Lamb of God, the one who takes away the sin of the world. This is whom God is sending, and all these people are coming for baptism to be cleansed, to be forgiven, to have their sins taken away.

And they get plunged down into the Jordan River, and they come up again. And yes, there's repentance going on the inside. The outside is the physical washing, but the inside, hopefully there's an inner conversion that's happening to these people that are coming for baptism. And then Jesus or John tells us that he sees Jesus, he sees him coming, and he's evidently he did come for baptism.

John doesn't spell it out, but that's what happened. John witnessed Jesus coming for baptism. So Jesus is the sinless one, the unblemished lamb, the spotless lamb who takes away the sin of

the world. He doesn't need repentance. He's the one who comes and stands in our place, so we can stand in that place behind him and receive all his forgiveness and all his love.

And I can't help but thinking this is close to Passover. In fact, the very next chapter of John's gospel is when Jesus goes up to Jerusalem with his disciples for the Passover feast. And as they in Jerusalem, all of these lambs are being brought up to be slaughtered for their blood to be put on the doorposts and the lintels, just as they did back in the day, back in the day when they were slaves in Egypt, and the blood was put on the doorposts and the lintel, so that the angel of death would pass over the Israelites, and they would be set free from their bondage in Egypt, and be able to be delivered into

new life, into the promised land. And so every year they reenacted this Passover feast, and the blood of the lamb was applied. And so here is the blood of the Lamb of God, the sinless one, the spotless one that cleanses sin for all time, for all places, for all people. And how interesting to I think that as this very scene was taking place where John saw Jesus coming and said, here is the Lamb of God, there could have very well been lambs being heard it up into Jerusalem for this feast.

They could have gone right by, as Jesus was saying, Here's the Lamb of God, and there's all those lambs going up for slaughter. But this is the one who takes away the sin of the world. He removes guilt and shame. He removes the shame that binds us and holds us in place. He removes the self-hatred, that stain that keeps coming back to re.

We ignite in us when we feel like we're not beloved, we're not good enough. Or the hamster wheel that we go on sometimes of self-condemnation where those loops happen in our brains and we tell ourselves lies about who we are and we believe them. And here is Jesus saying, he takes it all away. He breaks us free from those yokes that bind us.

He brings us out into the light. And don't we say under whom all hearts are open as we pray tonight? All desires known from whom all no secrets are hid. Everything comes out into the light. And then we are set free from it. If it stays in darkness, it keeps us trapped and entombed. Bringing to the light sets us free.

And so that we are fully seen. And we are fully known. And that that in itself is healing and cleansing. So not only does Jesus is the Lamb of God, not only does he do that work for us for all time, but John has an interesting point about his baptism. He says he's the one I was sent to baptize to reveal to Israel who he is and the spirit, the father told him he would see the spirit descend and remain on Jesus.

None of the other gospels talk about remain. John loves the word remain. He likes to remain and stay and abide and inhabit. He loves all those intimate terms, and this is the one on whom the spirit not only descends, but remains. The one who is anointed with the spirit, not just for a particular purpose at a particular time, like the prophets, priests and kings in the Old Testament.

But this is the one on whom the spirit stays, the one in whom the spirit abides and inhabits. It's the Scripture that Jesus pulls out in the synagogue in Nazareth, when he comes back from being in the desert and being tempted after his baptism. And he pulls out that scripture from Isaiah 61 and he reads, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news, to bind up the brokenhearted, to deliver, to bring sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That's who Jesus is. And as the father fills him with the Holy Spirit, he's empowered then to engage in that ministry. Before that time, he does no ministry until he's filled in, anointed with the Holy Spirit. And John also says to us, and he's the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. And so that gift is not just for Jesus.

The good news is God's reckless, never ending. Love is open wide. The arms are open wide. For us to receive that love, to receive the Holy Spirit being poured into us so that we're saturated, so that we're filled so that we know in every fiber of our being God's power, God's love, God's light filling us. Paul tells the Corinthians today in that reading he says, you lack no spiritual gift.

As you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those Corinthians had no lack of gifts. They had plenty of spiritual gifts. They had gifts of wisdom and understanding and knowledge and discernment. They had gifts of prophecy. They had gifts of healing. They had gifts of prayer. They had gifts of reading the scriptures and understanding what the Lord was saying to them, even gifts of speaking in tongues.

All of those gifts were present in the church in Corinth and the other churches that Paul founded. Because the spirit was alive in those folks, they were baptized. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they were manifesting those gifts. They received the giver of all good gifts, as we have two brothers and sisters. And the good news is, Luke tells us that we only need to ask.

We only need to seek. We only need to knock, and all of those gifts will be given to us. The Holy Spirit will be given. Luke says to those who ask, there's no exceptions. All I'll receive when they ask for more of the spirit. And so tonight I pray one of the things you might ask for is for more of the filling of the Holy Spirit in your life, to be that fountain that overflows with all the gifts of God, with all the love of God, with all the healing and purpose of God, so that you can be Jesus hands and feet in this world that so desperately needs it.

And the final part of this scripture is amazing. It's the disciples who are following John the Baptizer. And when John says for the second time to his disciples, look, there's the Lamb of God. Andrew and his companion turn and start to follow Jesus down the road.

And Jesus turns around, looks back, and I imagine his voice is tender when he says to them, what are you seeking? What are you looking for? What do you want? That question pierces our souls, reveals our deepest longings, and they just simply say to Jesus, where are you staying? Where are you remaining? Where can we be with you?

And Jesus says simply, come and see, come and see. Come and stay with me. He doesn't give them an address of where he's going. He doesn't give him the apple directions to get there. He just says, come and see, come and stay with me. And they stayed. Scripture says they remained with him that evening. They want to be up close to this, this rabbi, this teacher, and they want to learn from him everything.

And Andrew is so excited he can't stand it. He goes off to find his brother Simon. They're all fishermen and he comes back with Simon. And I love this part. Jesus looks at Simon.

And he says, you are Simon, son of John. Jesus sees him with eyes, but he sees him with divine revelation with a prophetic word. Yes, your son, your Simon, son of John. But you shall be called Peter, which means rock.

And I want to say to Jesus, really, Peter was a rock. You saw that even then, because if you've read anything of the Gospels and you hear Peter's story, Peter is impetuous. He's eager, he's slow to get it. Like most of the disciples are. And I think he has a perennial problem of foot and mouth disease, keeps inserting his foot all the time, and finally, at the end, he denies he even knows Jesus three times.

And yet Jesus is not done with him. Jesus restores him, forgives him, brings him back, heals him in a beautiful passage from John 21, right there by the seashore, and he calls him to even greater ministry. Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, care for my church.

And Peter follows him. And at the day of Pentecost, Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit as the other disciples are baptized in the Holy Spirit, immersed every fiber of his being. And that man goes out and he is no longer timid or afraid. He is bold as they all are bold enough to be a witness, bold enough to do miracles in Jesus name, and bold enough to be a martyr, to give his life for his Savior, for his faith as a witness.

That's Peter's story, I love it. It reminds me of a story from my own life, not so much mine, but my late husband's. Bob had a difficult time. He was. He had been a Roman Catholic priest. We met, we married. Long story. Tell you later, he looked for what he was called to do in life. And he tried different professions, but it just didn't suit.

He really wanted to be a priest, but in the meantime, he needed to make a little money, do something worthwhile. And so he was invited to teach in a school. A Christian school outside of Cleveland, Ohio. He taught sixth graders. Yeah, sixth grade is a great. I would never want to go back and repeat. I don't know about you, but he's trying to teach sixth graders geography and history.

They were not interested. This is the man who did Trivial Pursuit the best in history and geography. You never wanted to play against him on those. And these kids just were not getting it. And his classroom management was terrible. I'll just say that. And so at the end of the semester, he was invited to leave. He was fired.

And it was heartbreaking for a man who already felt depressed, who felt like a fish out of water, didn't know where he belonged, was struggling anyway. And then to be fired from a job is teaching. And he was a good teacher, at least of the Bible. He was maybe not sixth graders, and so he was very dejected. We came for a prayer ministry appointment at our church at Saint Luke's in Bath, Ohio.

I'll never forget it. Our rector and his wife met with us and she said, yeah, I can imagine. You know, she really listened to the story. They both listened and said, yeah, this is hard for you because you don't know where you belong. It is hard. And he described feeling like a failure, just a failure in everything in life.

And so we went into a time of prayer. And as we prayed, this priest's wife was listening to the Lord as well as listening to my husband. And she said to him, I see the word failure written all across your heart, all across your being. You've just taken that in. You've believed it. Yeah, that's true, that's true. And as we prayed some more, she said, you know what though?

The Lord's showing me something. Let me see if this resonates with you. She said what I see is a big eraser, and Jesus is taking that eraser, and he's erasing that word failure off of you. It no longer defines who you are. And she said, now let's listen and see what new name. Just like Simon Peter, see what new name the Lord will give you.

And so we were quiet for some moments and Bob's head was down. He was dejected. He was really struggling and in a few moments time his head popped up and he said, oh, he said, I see the Lord. And he's written, he's written this word on my heart. It's chosen, I'm chosen. I'm beloved. I'm a great teacher. The Lord delights in me.

I'm his beloved son. He's well pleased with me. And his face just lit up. And it changed the whole course of how he lived out those years. As we continued to seek for a bishop who would receive Bob as an Episcopal priest, finally came here in 1990. And that happened at Saint John's Cathedral, with Bishop serving. He.

But he's no longer a failure. He's chosen brothers and sisters. That's the kind of site the Lord wants to give us, not just what we see with our eyes, not just what we perceive every day, but what is the Lord's Word? What does he say to you? How does he want to heal you, speak to you, give you his truth, free you, forgive you, fill you with the Holy Spirit.

Tonight when you come, especially for communion, I ask you to come. And as Billy always says, come and stay here for a while. Come and remain. Come and stay. Come and abide with Jesus right here, and do your business with him and say, Lord, erase whatever it is. I don't want to carry that anymore. Lord, give me your new word for me, your new name.

Or Lord, forgive me for this sin, I release it, I let it go. You've already forgiven me. I don't need to carry this guilt, this shame anymore. I put it out into the light. Or Lord, fill me with the power of your Holy Spirit. I need that baptism of the Holy Spirit. I need to know what that is and operate in that and live in it.

To know that I'm beloved of God, that I'm also his chosen one in whom he delights. So come tonight and abide, and remain and inhabit and lean up against the breast of Jesus as the disciple John did at the Last Supper, and hear his heartbeat for you tonight. So, Lord, thank you for your word that goes forth. I pray that it bears much fruit in us that you do that work in us.

The work that we most long for, that we might be free to really, truly be those beautiful sons and daughters that you are calling forth into new life. We pray this Jesus in your name, Amen.