

Sermon – Sunday March 19, 2023

Rev. Randi

Those of you who attended the Ash Wednesday service will remember that one of my Lenten disciplines is reading the memoirs of a priest diagnosed with ALS soon after she was ordained. The book is *Sparrow, A Journey of Grace and Miracles While Battling ALS*. I promised to share parts of the book related to the lections as Lent progressed. I have two stories to share from that book today.

The priest, Jennifer Durant, says that the congregation accepted and loved her despite the ALS, for the most part. But she relays one painful encounter when the disease began to take away much of her muscular function. She started needing a wheelchair and an electronic voice to speak for her. A parish member approached the other priest in the congregation and said that the sight of Jennifer and her voice had frightened their children, and their children should not have to suffer that fright.

The other priest calmly replied that we couldn't protect our children from illness, death, the homeless, and the poor, nor shield them from seeing the world's brokenness. The encounter with Jennifer was a teaching moment, and if they chose to help their children avoid seeing Jennifer, they would lose the teaching opportunity.

The parents and their children saw Jennifer as a problem. They saw a physical disability and ran from it without seeing the image of God in Jennifer. They saw only a physical disability and didn't even allow themselves to get to know the heart of the person inside. They were much like the folks in Jesus's day who had seen the blind beggar every day and turned away. They didn't really see him. We know they didn't see him because they weren't sure he was the same person once Jesus healed him. In those days, they believed that people who were blind had hearts that were full of darkness, and "darkness" emanated from them. Alternatively, they suspected them of having an evil eye. The blind were sinners and to be avoided.

The folks in Jesus's day, like some of us in our day, couldn't see the image of God in the heart of those who weren't as they expected them to be. They believed God favored only the beautiful, the well-coifed, and the prosperous and not those who had a disability or lived in poverty, or otherwise looked different from "respectable society." They, like us, sometimes looked at others with human eyes rather than looking at them with God's eyes. As we read in Samuel, God sees the heart rather than the outward appearance.

As children of the light, we are called to live in the light of Christ. As part of living in the light, we are called to see the world as God sees it.

Now, for my second story from Jennifer's book. She writes about how she adjusted to work around the disease's progression. She adapted every time the condition took away something she was accustomed to doing. And, once, as she struggled to adapt, God gave her a gift.

Pastor Jennifer had adjusted from previously doing step aerobics to riding an exercise cycle instead. She would play music from her iPhone using earbuds. But, one day, her

fine motor skills went, and she dropped the earbuds. Everything went quiet. And in the silence, God gave her a gift of exceptional sight.

Here is what happened in her own words:

"Over by the bike ... there was a track. People were walking around the track. I looked into one face and then another, and in each countenance, I gazed at, I could see how they were broken.... I was frozen – just for a moment – then I scanned the next person, and then the next. ... In some cases, I could see the brokenness. I could see it etched in their faces or in the pain in their eye. But everyone was suffering – whether I saw it or not – and I could feel all of it in my own body. We were all one person, all broken, all suffering."

Walking as a child of light means taking the time to really see others. It means not just looking at the people on the track and thinking about whether they have cute leggings. Or just seeing someone walk and thinking, "Gosh, they look fat or gosh, they look thin." Or it means going beyond just glancing at someone in the grocery line while wishing we'd hurry up and get done. It means taking off the blinders that allow us to glance at someone who is disheveled or disabled and walking quickly by to avoid making eye contact.

Walking as a child of the light means really seeing every person we come in contact with. It means seeing them as human beings. It means seeing them as people like us who have gifts and brokenness.

We are all broken. When we realize our brokenness, the light of Christ can shine through us, and we see the world through God's eyes. As children of the light, we are called to see God's image in everyone and to be a light amid that brokenness.