

Third Sunday After the Epiphany (A/RCL)
Matthew 4.12-23
January 23, 2005
Holy Trinity, Manasquan

We all have our blind spots, even pastors. In *The Secret Life of Bees*, the book we discussed in Weekday Spirituality this past Wednesday, there's a Baptist preacher and an all-white congregation that has a blind spot called "racial prejudice." Back in the nineteen-sixties, down in South Carolina, a man of the cloth named Brother Gerard was preaching the Gospel with words and contradicting it with actions. Lily, the fourteen-year-old who narrates the novel, spills the beans when she says:

Every time a rumor got going about a group of Negroes coming to worship with us on Sunday morning, the deacons stood lock-armed across the church steps to turn them away. **We loved them in the Lord**, Brother Gerald said, **but they had their own places.**

Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*, New York: Penguin Books, 2002, p. 30.

There was some reverse discrimination going on, too. Lily and her black nanny, Rosaleen, had fled from home and sought refuge with a family of black women. One of them, August, welcomes Lily and Rosaleen with open arms, but her sister, June, realizes Lily is telling a cockamamie story about why she and Rosaleen are homeless. June says to August:

"You know she's lying,"...

"I know," August told her. "But they're in some kind of trouble and need a place to stay. Who's gonna take them in if we don't – a white girl and a Negro woman? Nobody around here."

... "But she's *white*, August."

This was a great revelation [thought Lily] – not that I was white but that it seemed like June might not want me here because of my skin color. I hadn't known this was possible – to reject people for being *white*. (Ibid, pp. 86-87)

Of course it's possible! 'Happens every day, people rejecting each other because of color, religion, and nationality, because of tattoos, body piercings, accents and clothing. It's as if we're looking in our mental rearview mirror and end up backing over someone because we don't realize there's a **human being** standing in our blind spot.

Brother Gerard and those lock-armed deacons were sitting "in the region and shadow of death" and didn't even realize it. They didn't **see** that they had a blind spot of prejudice. They thought they were basking in the light of Jesus and shining with Christ-light, but they weren't. They were kidding themselves.

We all know people who are kidding themselves, too. How about the person we know who is a raging alcoholic and doesn't **see** it? If these folks realized they are sitting "in the region and shadow of death" they'd get up and get into recovery. What about the person who needs to quit smoking pot or snorting coke or looking at pornography, but says those activities are harmless and there is no **need** for change? Sadly, they are sitting **happily** "in the region and shadow of death," causing great harm to themselves and great pain to those who love them.

We surely have blind spots, too. God **will** reveal them to us, though, if we're interested in **seeing** them. God will move us from darkness to light when we decide we'd have enough of the shadows and would like to move into the Son-shine. Sr. Barbara Jean is the mother superior of the Community of St. John Baptist, the group of Episcopal nuns who run the retreat house we visit twice a year. She recently wrote in their newsletter:

When we find [Jesus] there will be light. That light will radiate from us and lead others to seek him also. Let us each ask ourselves, "**Where am I still holding out against the light? What part of me is still dark?**"

(Community Notes, Christmas 2004)

Jesus says to **us**, who see **others'** blind spots much more clearly than our **own**,

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Matt.4.17b

The Greek word for “repent” that St. Matthew uses literally means, “Change your mind.” “Change your mind” that being a Christian means having been baptized once upon a time or simply having your name on a congregational roster. “Change your mind” and realize that **being a Christian** means **following Jesus today**. **Following Jesus today** means asking for grace to look at ourselves honestly, inviting God to expose and correct our blind spots, turning away from sin and toward the Lord, following in His footsteps in love and obedience, giving Him true worship and not lip service.

Following Jesus today also means calling others to follow Him. We can do this by inviting friends, family, neighbors to “Come and see” what our life of praise and service is like here at Holy Trinity. We can also call others to follow Him by proclaiming His faithfulness to us.

One opportunity to share your salvation history is to step forward and give a devotion in our upcoming midweek Lenten series. Does Holy Communion nourish you in a way that makes you want **others** to **hunger** for the Bread of Life as you do? Has Jesus, “the Light of the World,” dispelled the shadows and shed light on **your** path in a way you can describe to others? Do you know Him as the Good Shepherd, having been swept up in His arms and tenderly carried when you were weak? Has He healed your grief, so that You readily recognize Him as “the Resurrection and the Life”? Can you tell us how He is “the Way, the Truth and the Life” in **your** life? Is He the source of your vitality and joy, so that you can truly say you are a branch grafted onto the Vine of His love? If so, please speak with me about the possibility of sharing your story during Lent.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, “Where are we still holding out against the light? What part of us is still dark?” Rise like the dawn in our lives, we pray. Eliminate our blind spots that we may follow You in love and obedience, leading others, also, to walk in Your ways.

Amen