

Many years ago, Laura, my wife, and I were in a museum in London. I can't remember which one, but I do remember it was very quiet and empty. We were just minding our own business and suddenly a guard came up and said, "Just wait here." Well, my wife doesn't like being given instructions like that. She said, "Well, we want to go into that room over there." The guard said, "No, you just wait here," and he added, "You won't be disappointed." Rather enigmatic, we thought, so we just waited there. Very soon after, a very distinguished and dapper man walked into the other room. I heard Laura mutter under her breath, "Ooh, he looks like Cary Grant." Then a little woman carrying a handbag emerged just after him, and I thought, that's The Queen, so that man is Prince Philip. Suddenly, the penny dropped. I realized who this distinguished older man was, Prince Philip.

The penny dropped, and it was one of those moments that we're all familiar with. We've all had moments of recognition, of insight, when finally we see things and see people as they really are. Fans of Bridgerton will have witnessed the moment where Benedict finally recognizes Sophie as the masked woman at the ball. Listen, in our Easter stories, there's lots of moments of recognition in our Easter stories. Remember Mary in the garden. She thinks Jesus is the gardener. It's only when he addresses her by name that she thinks, "Oh, that's who it is. It's Jesus." Two disciples walking on the Emmaus Road. They don't recognize Jesus until they sit down and he breaks the bread at dinner. Again, the penny drops. They recognize him for who he is.

There's a similar moment of recognition in that long, very long, gospel reading that we just heard. The reading is all about those who recognize Jesus and those who don't. But before I get onto the gospel reading, I just want to have a word about that reading from the Old Testament, which also is about recognition and moments of recognition. The prophet Samuel was sent by God to anoint a king amongst the sons of Jesse and Jesse's sons are paraded before Samuel. When Eliab, the biggest and the most handsome comes before Jesse, Jesse

thinks, "Well, you're the man." But God says, "No, it's not him. I don't see as mortal sees," God says. They look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

That's the difference between looking and seeing. We can all look at the same thing but see different things. We have that in our modern parlance when we might say to someone, "Well, I see you," which means I see you as an individual, I recognize you as someone with your own story and background, I'm paying attention to you. I want to suggest that there's another stage to looking and seeing. We can look, we can see, and we can recognize. Samuel ends up not just looking and seeing at all of Jesse's sons, but he recognizes David as the one chosen by God to be the king. He sees that there's something special about David. The Lord says, "Rise and anoint him. He is the one." Samuel recognized him as the future king.

When we turn to the gospel reading from St. John set for today, we see a similar pattern. It starts off with a healing miracle and with Jesus using this unusual, if not unique process of spitting on his hands and putting the mud on the blind man's eyes. But the miracle story is not the center of attention in this long gospel reading. The actual healing of the blind man takes up most, but not all of the first paragraph, and there are five paragraphs in our reading. It's not just about the healing itself. Straight after the man has been healed, he's introduced to his neighbors who talk amongst themselves, asking, "Is this the man that used to sit and beg?" Some said yes. Others said, "No, it's just someone who looks like him." How tragic. They've been walking past this man and looking at him for years, but they've never seen him, let alone recognize him.

In the eyes of his peers, the man is contaminated, burdensome, expendable. In the community's calculus of human worth, the man barely registers. He's barely a human being. They don't know how to see him without his disability. To do so would be to recognize a common humanity with him, a kinship, a bond, and that would be intolerable. We still draw distinctions in our own time. We draw

distinctions between people who are legal and illegal. It's the same phenomenon. It struck me when I was reading this passage that no one, not even his parents, say to the ex-blind man, "How wonderful. How fantastic that you can now see. Let's celebrate." Nobody says that to him. They're all too caught up in how his healing affects them.

The next stage of the story involves the neighbors bringing the ex-blind man to the Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders, who from now on in the reading are simply known as the Jews. They conduct their own investigation of the healing, which involves talking to the man's parents. Their big concern isn't whether or if the man was healed, but when he was healed. They were scandalized by the fact that Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath, which broke, in their eyes, the religious law. If Jesus has broken the religious law, then therefore he must be a sinner.

Not only did they fail to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, they failed to recognize the reality about themselves. They were so concerned to maintain their own sense of self-righteousness and religious significance, that they failed to love another human being and join with him in rejoicing at his healing. The Pharisees didn't recognize that they deluded themselves. They thought that they were the spiritually enlightened and that they could see the truth, which is why Jesus is so harsh with them at the end of the reading. He concludes, "It's because you say, 'We see,'" Jesus says, "That your sin remains." The irony in the story is that those who claim to see are the ones who actually don't see.

It's hard for all of us to look and see and recognize in ourselves how we really are. We all have a blind spot there, and Lent is a time to address that, to look honestly at ourselves. Can we recognize where it is in our own life that we delude ourselves, tell stories that aren't completely accurate, the times we hide behind our sense of certainty and our being in the right? Lent is a time to reflect, to look at ourselves honestly, confident of God's love, mercy, and acceptance of us, and in the comfort of that knowledge to see where we are weak and falling short.

Finally, I want to point out the great moment of recognition towards the end of this story. Jesus searches out the ex-blind man, who's been driven out of town, and he says to him, "Do you believe in the son of man?" "Who's that?" says the ex-blind man. "Well, you've seen him," says Jesus. "He's the one who's speaking to you now." The man simply replies, "Lord, I believe." The penny dropped. He doesn't just see Jesus, he recognizes him as the Messiah, God's anointed. The man who had been physically blind now sees more clearly spiritually than anybody else in the story. His eyes were opened. He recognized Jesus as the one, the Lord, the Messiah, the one long promised, and he worshiped him. So, let me leave you with a question this morning: Have we had that moment of recognition? Has the penny dropped for us that Jesus is the Lord, the one? Amen.