

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

4 Lent  
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Fr. Bill McGinty

**“The Hand of God”**

There is a website that you can download on any computer called “Google Earth.” On it you can zoom in on any spot in the world. The place where you were born, grew up or went to school, is right there in front of you. You may tilt the angle of the camera and rotate the picture to see all sides of your old house or college. Every street is named and you can even see a car parked in the driveway.

If you like, you can take yourself on a geographical journey of your life and include every place you have ever been. I tell you all this, because it is only in looking back and reflecting that we can clearly see the pattern of our life. More than that we can see the hand of God in what happened to us and the directions we took. Oh, I know that from time to time we took a wrong path, and many times made mistakes. But, in examination, we can see that God presents us with choices, options and opportunities. Some we took, some we ignored. Constantly, we attribute our successes to ourselves and our failures we blame on someone else. Rarely, did we pause to ask: “What is God asking of me in this situation? What is the right thing to do? Where do I go from here?”

Yet, at the most important moments of our life, at times of decision or changes of direction, there are always signposts there. We don’t always see them or pay attention to them; but they are there. Mostly, we only notice them when we do look back and reflect on our past. All the signposts in my life have been people, parents, teachers, posters, siblings, brothers-in-law, professors, writers, parishioners, wife, aunts, uncles, friends and maybe even a couple of old girlfriends.

They influenced the direction of my life and the choices that I made and even what I thought.

David, Israel’s greatest King had signposts in his life also. The first of them was the prophet Samuel. In the whole of the Old Testament there is no one as selfless as Samuel, from being a boy to being a wise and aging prophet; Samuel’s life is geared towards serving God. He is the catalyst in bringing about God’s plan. In today’s reading he seeks out the young David and anoints him with oil, consecrating him to God. As the years roll on, it is David who attributes everything to himself. There is a sense in which his greatest mistakes lie in the fact that he is blind to God’s intervention and influence in his life. All his victories fame and fortune, David boasts are his alone, only in old age does he reflect on his life and see the hand of God and the signposts that he placed in David’s way.

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Too often we are no different from David. When we look at the wish list of our life, it is us who achieved the degree, passed the interviews, won the promotion, deserved the car, worked at the job, won our partner, built the marriage and raised the kids. We too, can be blind to the signposts in our life, the parent who sacrificed for us. The teacher who advised us, the friend who stood by us, Jesus in today's Gospel tells us that there are many kinds of blindness. Blindness is not restricted to those, who cannot see.

Have you ever seen a shorter second reading than the lesson that was chosen today from Ephesians chapter 5? "Sleeper awake. Rise from the death and Christ will shine on you."

When we critically reflect on the role that God plays on our life; when we include Christ in the equation of how and where our life is going, we are already praying. Contemplative prayer and meditation is to reflect and invite God's way into our thoughts and feelings and listen to what he is saying to us. Lent invites us to do that.

The Gospel today is in many ways a microism of our church, the state of religion and the state of politics and our nation. We see what we want to see and are blind to those things that militate against our cherished beliefs, political ideology or secret prejudice. We would all like to think that we are broad minded, intelligent and free thinking, but that is not always the case. The truth is that too often religion, government, the media and advertising prefer it if we make many of our decisions out of fear.

We are encouraged to chew gum because of the fear we have bad breath. We are persuaded to take out insurance for fear that we will die. A telemarketer phoned me up one day and said: "Do you know you are going to die and your relatives will face crippling costs for your funeral expenses? Is that what you want?"

I thought for a moment and told him: "Yes, I will probably die, but I've told them to sell all my body parts or give them away for research into stress on Pastors, why diets don't work and alcoholic related diseases."

He got mad and hung up. He was clearly playing on my fears. He is not the only one. Today we are told we cannot be too bald, too fat, and too thin. We are told what we can and cannot eat and instructed to drive a car that will save our life, while wiping out everyone else.

But in serious terms, we are told that all the important issues of our day from immigration to our relations with people must be decided on the basis of our fears.

Jesus in today's Gospel says, "No" my Gospel is not the Gospel of fear; it is the Gospel of love. Open your eyes to the possibilities that God presents in your life. For our God is not a God of fear and awesome might, our God is a God of love, a heavenly Father, a creator of opportunity. Open your eyes and see the signposts that speak God's message to you in your life. They are not to be found on the corners of streets. . They are to be found among

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friends, neighbors, fellow workers and even your children. Ask yourself today and every day: “What is God asking of me today? Who is the Samuel in my life? Ask yourself that question often enough and a very strange thing happens. Ask yourself that question often enough and “who is the Samuel in my life? Who is bringing God’s message to me, becomes: who am I a Samuel to? Who does God want me to be his message to?”

When that day dawns, when that question hits we know that God is working through us because it holds the pure selfless characteristic that was the hallmark of Samuel’s life.

When I was very young I had a school principal called Joe Devine. He was 6’5” and a wonderful educator, who took a personal interest in each one of his students. He directed them to be teachers, doctors, and nurses and from time to time helped point some towards priesthood. He had no children of his own and he died way to young at 59, six months before my ordination. Yet, I often think of Joe as this great signpost standing at the crossroads of so many children’s lives pointing them in the right direction. In 1968 I went to ask his advice about which college to attend. He was recovering from open heart surgery and told me the story of how his surgeon thought he had lost him.

After the surgery, Joe’s heart had refused to start up again. His surgeon and friend felt a tear run down his face that he had lost Joe. Then he said: “Suddenly, your heart in my hand gave a flutter, like a tiny bird and it started to beat.”

Joe said to me: “I wonder why God decided to keep me alive, because I was more than ready to go?”

Well, I think we all know why God kept Joe alive for eleven more years. He had a job for him to do. He was to be the Samuel in so many kids lives, priests, now working in Africa, and South East Asia, teachers around the world and not a few doctors and nurses, Moms and Dads.

As we pray this season of Lent let us too open our eyes and see God’s plan for us as children of the light. Let us see the hand of God in our life.

Let us be aware of the signposts. Let us open our eyes so that when Easter morning dawns the word **Alleluia** will truly mean something. Let us ‘awake from sleep. Rise from the dead and Christ will shine of us.’

Amen+

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