

## FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT 2020 A

One of my favorite books is “Gulliver’s Travels” written by Jonathon Swift in 1725. The main character in the book travels the world. In one place he appears as a GIANT among tiny people, while in another place he is a **tiny midget** of a man. It is Swift’s commentary on British society where, depending on your pedigree, you were either a BIG SOMEBODY or a TINY NOBODY.

This valuing or devaluing people by those in charge of a given society has been taking place since Eve offered Adam a bite of the apple and they both learned to take the word of the DECEIVER who belittled what God could give them. Grab for yourself instead of waiting for what God has to offer. “God helps them that help themselves” is the motto. In today’s lessons we see several examples of people trying to SIZE EACH OTHER UP—OR DOWN. We also see how God sizes us up.

In the Old Testament lesson, the prophet Samuel got to anoint Israel’s first king, Saul. Now God has decided that Saul was not acting in the best interests of the people, but rather in the best interests of Saul.

God tells Samuel that it’s time to pick a new king. Sam is reluctant to do so. Sam is afraid that Saul will kill him when he finds out. God gives Sam cover by telling him to say that he is just going to Jesse’s house to SACRIFICE TO THE LORD. That’s the truth. God just conveniently had him leave out the part about also picking one of Jesse’s sons to be Saul’s successor.

Samuel goes to the BLESSING where Jesse produces his sons from oldest to youngest. Sam assumes that the oldest and strongest will be God’s choice. This should be a QUICK AND EASY CHOICE. Sorry Sam: NOT HAPPENING. The one who Samuel and Jesse thought was the BIGGEST, STRONGEST AND MOST FIT was not who God saw.

God saw that the people of Israel needed someone who could protect them, lead them, and inspire them--someone who would lay down his life for those in his care. God looked at the shepherd boy, David, and saw those qualities. David looked HUGE

through God's eyes! This was a young man who took on lions and robbers and giants to protect those in his care. David was PLENTY BIG ENOUGH!

Speaking of shepherds, welcome to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, our next reading. Many of us could recite this in a coma. Yes the Lord leads us along green pastures and still waters, where our souls are revived. SOUNDS WONDERFUL! But then the Lord also leads us through the valley of the shadow of death, and sets up dinner reservations in the presence of our enemies. Why would a GOOD SHEPHERD lead us into such dismal places?

Let's be honest. None of us can avoid the reality of death, including our own? Which one of us can avoid making enemies along the way? Who would you rather have with you when you face death, a BIG MACHO GUY to try to get you to keep a stiff upper lip, or someone who will give you COMFORT AND HOPE? Who would you rather have help you with adversaries, a tough guy who will make sure you fight to show how tough you are, or someone who will help you to avoid revenge and help you negotiate peace? WHO IS REALLY THE **BIGGER** HELPER? Wouldn't you rather have BROTHER GOODNESS AND SISTER MERCY walking beside you?

Next is the lesson from Ephesians, where the APPARENT BIG TOUGH GUYS are the ones who are DRESSED IN DARK CLOTHES, doing DARK DEEDS OF DREAD! But the apostle Paul reminds us that LIGHT IS MORE POWERFUL because it helps us avoid reaching for things that will destroy us. Best of all, the one who stands in the light will also RISE FROM THE DEAD—THAT'S GETTING PRETTY BIG ISN'T IT!

Finally, we come to our Gospel story. There are the Pharisees, who are the Jewish BIGWIGS and there is Jesus. Let's see who comes across as the BIGGER MAN? Jesus and his disciples walk by a blind beggar, who is obviously not a BIG MAN IN SOCIETY! The disciples ask Jesus whose sin caused this man to be blind—with the assumption that he was MORALLY DEFICIENT and therefore LOW ON THE TOTEM POLE OF SOCIETY.

Jesus totally reverses their understanding of **STATURE IN SOCIETY**. The blind man wasn't **DEFECTIVE**. In fact he was **SINGLED OUT AS SPECIAL—A MAN TO BE HEALED**. Jesus not only gives the man sight by healing his eyes, but Jesus gives him dignity and most importantly, gives him courage to stand up for others. Jesus also gives him a sense of humor as he shows that the Pharisees can't identify where Jesus gets his power from. The Pharisees also don't understand why Jesus uses mud, a mixture of dirt and water—which is how the earth was formed and where new life grows!

The Pharisees couldn't stand to be put in their place, so they tried to devalue the healed man by making his miracle of sight **UNLAWFUL**. Didn't you know that there is a **PROPER TIME FOR EVERYTHING**—otherwise we would have **CHAOS**. And that we just couldn't have, right!? Then they wanted the healed man and his parents to throw Jesus under the bus as a **SABBATH RULE BREAKER**. For all intents and purposes they want Jesus **BELITTLED** for doing a **GREAT THING**. And they want the ones who were helped to be the ones to do the **DOWNSIZING OF JESUS!**

Apparently, Jesus' healing on the Sabbath, or Jesus **HEALING AT ALL**, makes him the **PHARISEE'S ENEMY #1** because they know they are caught in a trap of their own making. By outlawing doing **KIND DEEDS** on the **SABBOTH**, they have made the Sabbath a **DUTY** more than a **CELEBRATION**. People have to be **guilted** to be at Synagogue, at church. If the Pharisees had been OK with this Sabbath healing, they could have gotten the best of both worlds—**PEOPLE ACTUALLY EXCITED ABOUT BEING AT CHURCH—I MEAN SYNAGOGUE! WHAT A CONCEPT!**

But, **NO...**the Pharisees simply have a **BALLOON THEOLOGY**, by which I mean that they can only conceive of getting **BIGGER** if they are **PUSHING DOWN** on the others who are, of course **SMALLER** by comparison.

To bolter their argument that they are **MORE SPIRITUAL**, they claim to be disciples of **MOSES**, not this **JESUS GUY**. Too bad they weren't up on the **MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION** where Moses and Elijah bowed down to Jesus. Their loss!

Could our weekly Bible stories be ANY MORE CONTEMPORARY—ANY MORE NEEDED TODAY? God has Samuel anoint David to lead his people because he is the most courageous and compassionate leader who always puts those in his charge ahead of his own needs.

The Lord walks with us even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. No matter who is our enemy, we won't be alone, and we have the promise that we can dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

There is nothing like a pandemic like the Coronavirus to pull a shroud of darkness over us. But God's light reminds us that those who treat each other like family live in the light, while those who take advantage of the situation for their own benefit bring shame on themselves.

Finally, we see THE HEALER: JESUS. We also see those who demonstrated how power and position can CONFUSE & CORRUPT in the actions of the Pharisees. The Pharisees believe that the power resides in them, and that they are to be revered and their rules followed WITHOUT QUESTION. Their rule is based on their TOTAL CONTROL.

Jesus sees himself and his power as an opportunity to HEAL and to SERVE. Jesus is willing to roll up his sleeves and get down in the mud with the blind man. The purpose of the SABATH LAWS was so people would focus on God. Jesus has come to us to remind us that God's greatest desire is for us to become a COMMUNITY OF HEALERS!

All of us in the human family are faced with matters of life and death. We can choose life by becoming a FAMILY OF HEALERS and letting the rules and the leaders be the BEST SERVANTS THEY CAN BE. That's the leaders that God ANNOINTS!

And all of God's HEALERS said...AMEN!