

The Fourth Sunday of Lent – 22 March 2020

The Church of the Resurrection, scattered across Northern Utah

My friends, the Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Let us pray in the silence of our hearts
Give thanks for the gift of this day and pray for the life of a world in crisis:
God of the present moment, God who in Jesus stills the storm
And soothes the frantic heart; bring hope and courage to all of us
Who wait or work in uncertainty.
Bring hope that you will make us the equal
Of whatever lies ahead.
Bring us courage to endure what cannot be avoided,
For your will is health and wholeness.
You are God and we need you. Amen.

1 Samuel 16:1-13

The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the LORD." But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one."

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Psalm 103 The Passion Translation

With my whole heart, with my whole life,
and with my innermost being,
I bow in wonder and love before you, the holy God!

Yahweh, you are my soul's celebration.
How could I ever forget the miracles of kindness
you've done for me?

You kissed my heart with forgiveness,
in spite of all I've done.
You've healed me inside and out from every disease.

You've rescued me from hell
and saved my life.
You've crowned me with love and mercy.

You satisfy my every desire with good things.
You've supercharged my life so that I soar again
like a flying eagle in the sky!

You're a God who makes things right,
giving justice to the defenseless.

You unveiled to Moses your plans
and showed Israel's sons what you could do.

Lord, you're so kind and tenderhearted
to those who don't deserve it
and so patient with people who fail you!

Your love is like a flooding river
overflowing its banks with kindness.
You don't look at us only to find our faults,
just so that you can hold a grudge against us.

You may discipline us for our many sins,
but never as much as we really deserve.

Nor do you get even with us for what we've done.
Higher than the highest heavens—
that's how high your tender mercy extends!

Greater than the grandeur of heaven above
is the greatness of your loyal love, towering over all
who fear you and bow down before you!

Farther than from a sunrise to a sunset—
that's how far you've removed our guilt from us.

The same way a loving father feels toward his children—
that's but a sample of your tender feelings toward us,
your beloved children, who live in awe of you.

You know all about us, inside and out.
You are mindful that we're made from dust.

Our days are so few, and our momentary beauty
so swiftly fades away!

Then all of a sudden, we're gone,
like grass clippings blown away in a gust of wind,
taken away to our appointment with death,
leaving nothing to show that we were here.

But Lord, your endless love stretches
from one eternity to the other,
Unbroken and unrelenting
Toward those who fear you
And those who bow face down in awe before you.

Your faithfulness to keep every gracious promise you've made
Passes from parents, to children,
To grandchildren, and beyond.

You are faithful to all those who follow your ways
And keep your word.

God's heavenly throne is eternal, secure, and strong,
And his sovereignty rules the entire universe.

So bless the Lord, all his messengers of power,
For you are his mighty heroes who listen intently
To the voice of his word to do it.

Bless and praise the Lord, you mighty warriors,
Ministers who serve him well and fulfill his desires.

I will bless and praise the Lord with my whole heart!
Let all his works throughout the earth,

Wherever his dominion stretches,
Let everything bless the Lord!

Ephesians 5:8-14

Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Psalm 23 King James Version (KJV)

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

A (revised) dramatic reading of John 9:1-41

(“Blind Bartimeus” is the narrator. **Jesus’s words are in red.** *The voices of the crowd are italicized.*)

It was Saturday morning. Halfway into the Sabbath. I was getting a little restless. Not being able to work and all. Well, actually I beg. Because I can’t see, there’s not much work for me to do. So instead, I rely on people’s generosity, and their obligation to look out for people like me. I wait until their consciences are pliable and hold out my cup so they can put money in it. Or they can give me some of their bread. Either way. I will be able to eat.

I usually sit down by the entrance to the temple because there is a lot of activity there. And a lot of really good, generous people go in and out all day. I may be blind, but I'm not stupid!

I could hear a commotion, with people shuffling around. People whispering. My hearing is awfully good, and I count on it a lot to get information I cannot access because I can't see. People were whispering to Jesus. Jesus was a teacher who came down from Galilee to the temple often to teach. He must have been awfully good, because I could hear lots of footsteps behind him wherever he went."

Rabbi! Rabbi, over here!

(That means teacher in case you didn't know).

So what about that blind man there.

(They were talking about me.)

Who sinned and caused him to be blind?

Was it his parents? It must have been his parents.

Oh, I'm SURE it was his parents.

Or was it him? But how COULD it be him --- he was born not being able to see. That doesn't make any sense.

Or maybe his grandparents. I know them. They're sinners for sure.

Stop thinking like that. Blindness isn't caused by sin. It's just a thing that happens sometimes because the world isn't a perfect place. But because he IS blind, God's goodness can be revealed in him. He may have been in darkness all his life. But you know what? I am the light of the world.

When Jesus said that, he spit on the ground, and made a special healing mud out of the dirt. And he scooped it up and put it on my eyes. Or I should say my eyelids. Then he told me to go wash in the pool of Siloam, where people get healed.

OK, I thought. --- what have I got to lose? I've got **nothing** to lose! I pulled on the sleeve of my friend next to me,

I can't believe that Jesus had just put muddy spitballs on your eyes,

and he took me over to the pool of Siloam. I had mud sliding down my face, and I must have been quite a sight

I could tell everyone was staring at me, even though I couldn't see them. I washed my face at the pool of Siloam, and my friend took me back to Jesus.

On the way there, light started pouring into my eyes. And it hurt because I just wasn't used to it. But little by little, I adjusted to the light and began seeing shapes. And then shapes turned into objects.

It sounds funny, but I had NO IDEA what those objects were! People didn't look *anything* like what I had imagined. And colors.... who knew they were so beautiful and different from each other? It took me a LONG time to get back to Jesus because I kept stopping along the way to take everything in.

My friend pointed me to Jesus, but it really wasn't necessary because I could have picked him out of any crowd. He was the one with the biggest smile on his face, even bigger than mine was. I didn't know you could *actually see love* but the love was pouring through his eyes, and I didn't even know love could do that.

Before I was able to take Jesus hand in mine and thank him, people were pushing me for answers.

Wait. Isn't this the blind guy?

That's the same guy who begs here every day right? Am I right?

I'm confused. I think he only looks like that blind guy.

So I looked them right in the eyes, because I finally could....and said. Yup. That's me. I'm the guy you're talking about. I'm the guy you walked past everyday like you couldn't see me even though your eyes were perfectly good. I'm the one. I tried to use my best angry voice, but I just couldn't because I was so very happy to be able to see.

So, tell us what happened?

Why can you see all of a sudden?

Well. That man, that guy right there, spit in some mud and put it on my eyes, told me to go wash so I could see again and I did so I can.

Who are you talking about? Jesus? Where did he go?

Then they grabbed me and took me to the authorities. Because, of course, it was the Sabbath day. And I told my story all over again.

The authorities were less impressed with the fact that I had been healed than they were with someone who reversed my blindness. What a sinner Jesus is, they said. We can't believe he would heal you on the Sabbath.

What do you think about Jesus?

Well, I said... he's a prophet, straight from God.

They'd never seen me before, so they didn't actually believe that I had always been blind, never saw a day in my life. They thought maybe Jesus had pulled a trick, and not actually made my eyes see.

Is this your son? The one born blind?

Yes, this is him alright. We are absolutely sure that he's never seen anything in his whole life.

But what we're not sure about is why and how all of a sudden it is that he can see. Ask him. He's an adult. He can speak for himself.

I felt sorry for my parents. Because they knew the authorities would blame them somehow. And if they said Jesus healed me, then they'd get kicked out of the synagogue. They came back in and got me.

Glory to God --- it looks like it's a miracle.

Even though Jesus is a sinner because he healed you on the Sabbath.

I really don't know if he's a sinner or not. But one thing I do know. And only one thing: I used to be blind, and now I can see. That's all I know.

But how, how'd he do it?

I wanna know how he did it.

I told you already. Spit, mud, wash in the water. Bam. Sigh. You want to believe in Jesus, too don't you?

Hell no. We are disciples of Moses, never of Jesus.

We don't know where he comes from.

And yet ... he opened up my eyes. God must be on his side, or he wouldn't have been able to do it.

*You're going to lecture **us** about God and what God does? Get out of here.*

And they threw me out. I picked myself up off the ground, and found I was at Jesus feet. I stood up and was eye to eye with Jesus.

Do you believe in the Son of Man?

I would if I knew who he was. (laughing)

Well, you're looking at him, pal. (laughing) It's me.

I fell back to the ground and worshipped him.

I've come so that blind people can see even when they're surrounded by people who can see but refuse to see.

what are you talking about?

You think we're blind?

If you were incapable of seeing, no one could blame you for not seeing. But you, you are *choosing* not to see, and there will be consequences for that.

After that, I walked home, looking at every little bush and rock along the way.

What a day that was! Yes, my eyes were opened. But my heart was opened too. Jesus healed me physically AND spiritually I've been enlightened. I met, and actually looked in the eyes of the Messiah: the one God sent to show us how much he loves us and how

deeply he cares for the way we live our lives and treat each other. The irony is of course, that I only know one thing. (two things really or maybe three) --- that I can see again and that Jesus healed me and that those who profess to be the authorities on all things spiritual don't know that at all.

So today, on a day when I am supposed to do no work according to God's law, I have even more work to do. I am no longer a beggar, but I can tell my story. I can tell people what I do know. Deep in my heart. In a way that changed how I see things forever. (did you catch that pun?)

God used me today to illustrate a point – that Jesus is the light of the world. I am more than happy to have him use me to help other people see that light.

Prayers of the People

We join our hearts together in prayer:

We pray for the people of the world as they are infected by or confronted with COVID-19.

Forgive us when we have feared others.

And in doing so have contaminated our hearts.

Forgive us when we have hoarded our resources.

And in doing so have abandoned our witness.

Forgive us when we have desired control.

And in doing so have not loved our neighbor.

Comfort the afflicted among us. In their loneliness, provide care. In their sickness, provide health. In their weariness, provide rest.

We grieve the contagious fear that we consume and spread.

Soothe our anxious minds as we read the headlines. Calm our spirits and clear our minds. **Protect us from the evil one**.... who aims to use each update, not to inform or guide, but to stoke the flames of chaos and confusion.

We thank you for health care workers ... who care for the sick and tend to bodies and souls with great compassion and commitment, putting themselves and their families at risk. We ask for direction for researchers who tirelessly look for a vaccine and a cure, and for courage for those in leadership as they seek ways to relieve this crisis.

We pray for those who lack access to health care, or safe places to rest their heads. We pray for the vulnerable: the sick, the disabled, the elderly, the uninsured. **For the kingdom is theirs.**

We pray for those working paycheck to paycheck, those who worry about their children and their livelihoods ... **for they reflect your image.**

We pray for the chronically ill fighting invisible battles, hour by hour, day by day. Nourish their bodies. Protect their souls.

For they are never out of your sight. We lament our roles in a system

That values profit over human life and takes advantage of our anxious spirits.

We acknowledge that we are not immune to the human condition.

Insert here the prayers for those who are on your heart today.

Ignite in us a spirit of generosity, of hope and mercy, of grace and truth, of gentleness and self-control.

Cleanse our spirits. Comfort our minds. Care for our bodies. And make us new. We give thanks that you lavish your grace upon us.

When all else falls away, we turn to you and you alone.

We pray this in the name of Jesus who healed the sick and sat with the poor. Amen.

Hymn 567

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FkKOvoX7OU>

Thine arm, O lord, in days of old
Was strong to heal and save.
It triumphed o'er disease and death,
O'er darkness and the grave.
To thee they went the blind, the deaf,
the palsied, and the lame,
The leper set apart and shunned,
The sick with fevered frame.

And lo! Thy touch brought life and health,
Gave healing, strength, and sight:

And youth renewed and frenzy calmed
Owned thee, the Lord of light.
And now, O Lord, be near to bless, almighty as of yore,
In crowded street, by restless couch,
As by Gennesaret's shore.

Be thou our great deliverer still,
Thou Lord of life and death; restore and quicken,
soothe and bless, With thine almighty breath:
To hands that work and eyes that see, give wisdom's heavenly lore,
That whole and sick, and weak and strong,
May praise thee evermore.

Let us pray. O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength; By the light of your Christ and the might of your Spirit, life us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.