

Lent 4

March 22, 2020

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CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God, who is present, who gives life, who calls into existence the things that do not exist. Amen. If you were to keep watch over sins, O Lord, who could stand? Yet with you is forgiveness, and so we confess.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Gracious God, have mercy on us. We confess that we have turned away from you, knowingly and unknowingly. We have wandered from your resurrection life. We have strayed from your love for all people. Turn us back to you, O God. Give us new hearts and right spirits, that we may find what is pleasing to you and dwell in your house forever. Amen.

Receive good news: God turns to you in love. "I will put my spirit in you, and you shall live," says our God. All your sin is forgiven in the name of ☩ Jesus Christ, who is the free and abounding gift of God's grace for you. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into the darkness of our hearts, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

GOSPEL READING – John 9:1-41

¹As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He answered, "The man called Jesus made



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mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹²They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

SERMON

How could they not see?! How is it they didn't understand?! The man born blind had already told the Pharisees five times how the man named Jesus had anointed his eyes with mud made from his spit, and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. But they still didn't get it!



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The Pharisees kept telling the man who was formerly blind that Jesus could not be from God, for God does not listen to sinners. They kept telling him that Jesus must be a sinner because he performed an act of healing on the Sabbath, which was forbidden in Jewish law at the time. They even wanted the man born blind to repent for being healed by Jesus.

But the man born blind was absolutely astonished by the Pharisees and their lack of vision. How could something so obvious turn out to be such a stumbling block for them? So the man born blind tried one more time to help the Pharisees understand. “Hey guys, this guy Jesus, he opened my eyes. We all know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, yet never before has this ever happened! Jesus was the first to open the eyes of a man born blind! We also know that God will listen to those who worship him and do his will. Are you connecting the dots yet? Jesus wouldn’t have been able to open my eyes if he weren’t from God!

Of course, the Pharisees didn’t take too kindly to a man, whom they deemed to be totally in sin, teaching them about God, so they threw him out of the synagogue. In doing so, they remained cut off from abiding relationship with Jesus, for he refused to see that Jesus is the way to God; that Jesus is God.

This story always reminds me of how hard we as broken human beings can try to convince ourselves that the truth, which is staring us right in the face, just cannot be true. This is especially the case when the truth disrupts our way of life, our belief systems, and our sense of control. For the Pharisees, Jesus healing on the Sabbath and Jesus claiming to be from God disrupted their own beliefs, which in turn would disrupt their way of life and the power they enjoyed as religious authorities.

For us, I’m sure each of us can think of times in our own lives when the truth created a disruption for us. I have witnessed through social media that there are still plenty of people in our country who deny the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are in denial that this virus is a threat. I was also in some denial about COVID-19 just a couple of weeks ago. I didn’t think it warranted such concern, but my eyes were opened when I came to realize the rapid growth of the virus and the potential danger it has on those of us who are immune compromised, which includes myself since I have type II Diabetes.

Now, in my experience, sometimes we also want to deny the truth when it reveals our true identity. Sometimes we get so lost in our own brokenness, or we become so convinced by society’s labels, that we convince ourselves that the truth is that we are worthless, unworthy, someone others are ashamed of, a person who only makes mistakes and terrible decisions. Because of this, when we are told by God that we are beloved, that we are worth more than gold, we have a hard time believing it.

Even though I’m a pastor and my ministry is all about proclaiming the love of God to others, I have had plenty of times in my life where it has been hard for me to accept God’s grace for me. There was a time in my life where I was unconvinced that God could call me to be a pastor because of my own sense of brokenness. It was during my first year of seminary. I was still trying to manage my depression, my



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mother was a severe alcoholic, and I was dealing with my own food addiction and the health problems it was creating for my body. I could hardly believe that God would call me into ministry when I was so broken. Thankfully I had some good teachers and guides that eventually helped me to realize that God's love for me not only transcends my brokenness, not only forgives it and heals it, but also gives it to me as a gift that frees me to walk with others in compassion and love. These teachers and guides helped me to accept the truth that God's love for me was more powerful than my brokenness.

The man born blind, in my mind, is a hero of faith that we can look up to. He was a man who blindly (yes, pun intended) did as Jesus commanded, not knowing whether or not Jesus was able to actually heal him. But this man accepted the truth about Jesus and went and washed. Then, this man held onto the truth and confessed it to others, even when he was threatened by the Pharisees to be thrown out. This man born blind had never even seen Jesus, yet he knew that Jesus was from God. And when Jesus finally revealed himself to the man born blind, the man immediately worshipped Jesus.

This man born blind reminds us of the disrupting truth of God's love. It is a disrupting truth because it denies the false claims that we try and cling onto, whether we use those claims to lord over others, or we use those claims to tear ourselves down. God's disrupting truth reminds us that all human beings, no matter our gender, our sexual orientation, our age, our race, or our ethnicity, all of us are beloved by God. This means that all human life is sacred. This also means that nobody, not even ourselves, can truly deny the truth that we are God's beloved.

The man born blind is our inspiration as the church to remind our community, our society, our nation, and the world, that all lives are worth saving. We are free to remind people that the social distancing we are currently practicing helps to preserve all life. As much as it can be challenging to isolate ourselves, and as much as it is a disappointment that we will not be able to gather for Holy Week or Easter (this will be the first time in my life that I have never been to an Easter Sunday service), by doing so we are affirming to the world that God's love cherishes all life among us. We also do this through continuing our food pantry ministry in the midst of this pandemic. We do this through checking in with each other to make sure our communal needs are being met. We do this through reaching out to those of our elders who are homebound to see if we can run to the grocery store for them. We do this through ordering takeout from our local restaurants. And we do this through continuing to pray for our healthcare workers and all essential personnel who continue to work during this pandemic.

In doing these things during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic we are also confessing to the world that Christ Jesus is indeed our Lord and savior, and that faith in Jesus is life-giving. The world may want to continue to deny the truth, but by continuing to live in a way that proclaims God's love to all people, especially in this current climate, The truth shall open eyes and set us all free. **Amen.**

HYMN – ELW 502

PRAYERS



Turning our hearts to God who is gracious and merciful, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

God of insight, open the hearts of the church and the world to all who testify to your deeds of power. Raise up voices in your church that are often silenced or overlooked due to age, gender expression, race, or economic status. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, empower us to care for the land and all living things that dwell in it and beneath it. Provide rich soil for crops to grow. Bring rain to lands suffering drought. Protect hills and shorelines from damage caused by erosion. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, bring peace to all people and nations. Anoint leaders who seek goodness, righteousness, and truth on behalf of all. Frustrate the efforts of those who would seek to cause violence or terror. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, you care for our needs even before we ask. Come quickly to all who seek prayer this day (*especially*). Accomplish healing through the work of doctors, nurses, physical therapists, nutritionists, and all who tend to human bodies. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, help this assembly lift up the unique gifts of each person who enters, no matter their physical capacity, cognitive ability, or sensory need. Help us to be creative and brave in making our facilities and our ministries accessible to all. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, you call out to those who are asleep and awaken them to new life with you. We give thanks for your saints (*especially*). Join us together with them as your children in this world and the next. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

According to your steadfast love, O God, hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to you; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor, and give you peace.

In the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



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