

These scripture readings are for Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 22, 2020

Also, for your convenience in bringing by your offering, the offering plate is in the rear of the church on a stand in the center aisle. Pastor will have the main doors of the church open for your convenience. If you are not going out into the community you may mail your offering to: Bethel Lutheran Church, 626 Shoshone, Lander, WY 82520. We are gathering the mail and taking care of items as they arise.

God's Blessings to you.

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 42:14-21

¹⁴ I have kept still and restrained myself;
now I will cry out like a woman in labor;
I will gasp and pant.

¹⁵ I will lay waste mountains and hills,
and dry up all their vegetation;
I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools.

¹⁶ And I will lead the blind
in a way that they do not know,
in paths that they have not known
I will guide them.

I will turn the darkness before them into light,
the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I do,
and I do not forsake them.

¹⁷ They are turned back and utterly put to shame,
who trust in carved idols,
who say to metal images,
"You are our gods."

¹⁸ Hear, you deaf,
and look, you blind, that you may see!

¹⁹ Who is blind but my servant,
or deaf as my messenger whom I send?

Who is blind as my dedicated one or blind as the servant of the LORD?

²⁰ He sees many things, but does not observe them;
his ears are open, but he does not hear.

²¹ The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake,
to magnify his law and make it glorious.

Epistle: Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful

even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Holy Gospel: John 9:1-41

⁹ As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰ So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸ The 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 ¹⁹ and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰ His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. ²¹ But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²² (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should

that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) ²³ Therefore his parents said, >“He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ He 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?” ²⁸ And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes

from.”³⁰ The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.”³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”³⁴ They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus said, For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?”⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

Sermon 13 – Fourth Sunday of Lent

“And, At Last, We See”

John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39

Dear friends in Christ,

John in our Gospel lesson records a unique miracle by Jesus. This is unique in a few ways, not the least of which is because of the detail in which John examines it. The guy who benefited from the miracle is given center-stage for a little while, which is a little strange, but John is all about strange. That's how he works. The thrust here is revealed early on, so let's get to it.

“As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, 'rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” Common question, logical conclusion. FYI, the disciples aren't coming up with this out of nowhere, this was what was commonly taught by the Pharisees, who are going to enter the stage in a little bit. This guy has something wrong, so they conclude that he must have done some kind of sin to earn that. Guy's born blind, so what did he do to earn that kind of punishment? Jesus knocks this down right away. **“It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”** Jesus severs the connection between being blind and sin. The disciples are, as we humans do all the time, asking the wrong question. Jesus points this out and He tells them what's going on. One thing I want to say right off the bat. Don't take Jesus' statement too far. Jesus points to the blind guy and He says, “that man's blindness is so that the works of God might

be displayed.” That man. Only that man. We cannot take this statement and use it to say that every time something goes wrong, it's going wrong so that the works of God can be displayed in Him. Okay? All suffering is not just an excuse for God to show off, so please do not try to apply this statement to you. It's just for him.

Okay, that's done. What else does Jesus say? **“We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day, night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”** Boom. That's the thrust here, the center of this miracle. Jesus is the light of this world, and that's what this story shows us and tells us. Jesus is there to bring light to a mankind that prefers the darkness. Keep that in your mind as we go through the story. This is Jesus' mission statement in John, His goal, His purpose. Bringing light. With that at the purpose, what does Jesus do?

“Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, 'go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.” He opens the man's eyes, and He uses earthly things to do it. His spit. Mud. With these, and the Word of Jesus, the man's eyes are opened. Jesus brought light to that man for the first time in that man's entire life.

John, the writer of this Gospel, is absolutely brilliant, because John works on two levels. You see this all over the Gospel when you look for it. John talks about the things that Jesus says and does on earth, but those things often have a double meaning, a heavenly meaning, a theological meaning I guess. This miracle is a classic example of this brilliance. Jesus heals a man born blind. Sure. Fine. That's a miracle, and now this poor guy can see for the first time. Jesus is not doing this just out of compassion, Jesus is doing this to show exactly what He is in the world. He's in the world not to cure illnesses, not to dispense bumper-sticker candy wisdom like some kind of vending machine, Jesus is in the world to give light to it. To give light to us. To open our eyes, just like He opened the eyes of the blind man.

That blind man is all of us. We can't see God, we can't know God, we can't do anything but resist God and hate God until Jesus steps in. Medicine couldn't cure that blind man, no one could help him but God. In the same

way, no one can help us but Jesus. Blindness is a good way to describe sin, and you'll see a fine example of this later in the story. Go to verse 16. The Pharisees bring in this blind man because they want to find out what the heck is going on, and the blind man tells them what went on. What is the Pharisees conclusion? **"Some of the Pharisees said, 'this man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath.' But others said, 'how can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' He answered 'whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see. They said to him, 'what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?'** The Pharisees don't have a clue. They don't see. They're blind to what is right in front of them: Evidence that Jesus Christ is from the God that they claim to worship. That Jesus Christ is the one promised by God to be the Messiah, who would take away sins forever as the perfect sacrifice. The evidence is right there, and they're arguing over what it means and getting hung up on the Sabbath. That's what sin does, folks, to the entire human race. It blinds us. We can't see the truth, even when there's so much evidence, even when its so darn obvious, unless God opens our eyes. The man starts to get impatient with this repeated questioning, and the fact that the Pharisees just don't seem to get it. **"He 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?"** He's getting sarcastic here. He's told them straight up. This man Jesus healed his sight, opened his eyes. The Pharisees don't like this. **"And they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from."** They don't know. Jesus performs a miracle, a miracle that shows his power as the son of God, a miracle that Isaiah prophesied about in the OT, and they can't see it. **"The man answered, 'Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Since this world began has been it heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'** They answered him, **'You were born in utter sin and you would teach us?' And they cast him out."**

Two different players in this story, folks. You have a man who's eyes were opened by Jesus, he's testifying to what happened. Hey, guess what, I was born blind, this guy made me see. You have Pharisees, fellows who make their living teaching folks about God. These folks can't see it. They can't see that a man who opens the eyes of the

blind is in fact the Christ, the Son of God, the same God that the Law that is their life testifies to constantly. They are blind to the fact that this is the one Moses himself prophesied about in Deuteronomy 18, that a prophet's gonna come, like me, but way better. God's words will be in the mouth of this prophet, and he's going to speak everything God commands. Moses said that. The man who these Pharisees claim to be disciples of. They can't see it.

That's sin. That's the disease we have, that's what we all suffer from, and without God's intervention, that is what we would be. Never forget that. That is what human beings are, they can't see Jesus unless Jesus brings the light that we all need. Look at Jesus' closing words. **“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see become blind.”** That's one of the great paradoxes of Christianity. You want to see clearly? It starts by recognizing just how blind sin makes us. Jesus Himself says it. You think you see? You think you don't need a light? You think that your eyes are working just fine without Jesus? Think again. Look in the mirror and remember that you are blind, dead, in need of forgiveness. Flailing around in the dark? Repent, and Jesus will bring light to you. Now I gotta be clear. What is the light that Jesus brings? Himself. He brings a good conscience in knowing that sins are forgiven, that life has a purpose, and that purpose is to receive God's gifts in church, and then to go out and love the neighbor as yourself. That's the light Jesus will give to you, forgiveness, a life that will go on beyond death into eternity, cleanness from the dirtyness of sin. What a light that is! Jesus, Jesus living, Jesus crucified, Jesus resurrected to open your eyes to your sin, pay for your sin, and give you life everlasting, that is a light that will never go out. Ever. It will never fail you. The devil won't snuff it – he tries, and it's kinda pathetic, when you think about it – your sinful flesh will distract you from it with all the hassles, annoyances, and busyness of a life that's way too crowded with noise. But it won't go out. That light comes from the Bible, it shines from faithful churches who preach it and offer it. I tell you this because the devil will try to turn you away, he'll feed your ego, tell you things that you desperately want to hear. He'll tell you that you're just fine, you make mistakes but God doesn't care, He's too nice. Your sinful flesh will tell you that you're too poor, that you're too busy, that this is just the opinion of some dead guy and who gives a hoot about it. The temptations to turn away from this light are so many, I can't possibly name them all. That's why you need the light. You need it to shine on you, banish your darkness.

I won't tell you to open your eyes. I will tell you this: You're sinners, your eyes are closed. Doesn't matter what you think or what you want, that's the way it is. But God has opened them with the light of Jesus Christ. He's shone on you, born blind to Him, and He will continue to shine on you as long as you recognize, I'm blind, I need God to open my eyes.

Amen.