

Thank you for joining the St. Stephen's Memorial Episcopal Church in Lynn, Massachusetts, for Sunday Worship. It is March 22nd, 2020, the 4th Sunday in Lent. I am Tom Barrington, Interim Priest at St. Stephen's I am recording this from study at home.

This service runs for about 25 minutes. As we are adjusting to the restriction dictated by the Covid-19 virus this is our first virtual worship service. We appreciate any feedback on how it can be improved.

THE PENITENTIAL ORDER

Celebrant Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins.

People God's mercy endures for ever.

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Priest says

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**

Kyrie:

Lord, have mercy upon us

Christ, have mercy upon us

Lord, have mercy upon us

The Collect for Purity

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord.

Amen

Collect for the 4th Sunday in Lent

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

THE 23RD PSALM

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.

The Gospel Reading John 9:1-41

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 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.**" When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

The 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?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then 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." Some 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. So 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."

The religious authorities 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 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but 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." His parents said this because they were afraid of the authorities; for they had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So 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." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. 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?"

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?" Then 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 do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing 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 he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

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

The Word of the Lord. Thanks Be to God.

Sermon notes March 22, 2020 Lent 4A: John 9:1-41

This amazing story presents the blind man receiving his sight, while the sighted religious authorities slowly go blind.

It begins with Jesus establishing the theme of light and darkness,
"I am the light of the world."

Then we have the blind man introduced as a passive object lesson about sin and judgement.

However, Jesus has compassion on him. The man receives the mud on his eyes, washes, and he can see.

That, however, is not the end of it. His "sight" continues to increase.

In the story he is questioned four times as to who and how was this done. Each time he can see more clearly what God is doing.

- The first time he answers, "***The man called Jesus.***"

- The second time, answering the skeptical Pharisees, **He says, "He is a prophet"**
- The third time **he says *he is from God***.
- "Then in the climactic response to Jesus' own questions, **the man comes to see Jesus as *the Son of Man* and he worships him.**

He moves from actual and spiritual blindness to complete sight.

In contrast the religious authorities, the Pharisees, move in the opposite direction.

- **They begin by accepting the fact that he was healed**, asking how he had received his sight.
- **Then they begin to doubt the very fact of the miracle by questioning his parents.** "Was he actually born blind? "
- In the **third interrogation they have lost all interest in the miracle** and are just trying to discredit him. They refuse to accept any speculation that Jesus is from God.
- Finally Jesus pronounces "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."

The invitation for us is to be among those who are given sight.

However, we also hear the warning to those of us who claim that we see just fine!

This story is wonderful and tragic.

It is wonderful for the man but it results in his banishment.

It is wonderful for the community as they got to experience the God grace and love, but show how quickly doubt darkens God's work.

It is a tragic condemnation to the religious authorities and all those who choose to not see.

For me, in this time of the Corona Virus pandemic, social distancing, quarantine and economic peril, it is a reminder for us to chose to keep on seeing. As we are being forced to isolate ourselves it is easy to retreat into the blindness of fear, rumors, isolation, depression and trauma. We have seen this in panic buying, scapegoating, and/or denial.

The challenge for us as Christians, as humans, is to keep seeing hope even as we have to distance ourselves so we do not get the virus or unwittingly pass the virus to others.

I have been heartened by the number of people who have been reaching out by phone or on the internet. Please continue to keep in touch with each other and those who are living alone or are especially isolated.

I apologize for having to close the church building and not having services. It has forced me to figure out this technology. I encourage you to keep checking our web site or Facebook page for news and resources.

I am proud of St. Stephen's resolve to keep the Food Pantry open because so many of our members and neighbors have lost their jobs and do not money for food. A number of our volunteers have had to step away because they are at high risk of having serious complications if they get infected. We have established protocols of keeping distance and frequent hand washing. We have also been in conversation with the City Health Department, who have encouraged us to keep the Pantry open.

These are scary and weird times. I pray that like the man born blind, we may not simply stop being blind, but grow in insight, compassion and

love as we trust in God's light. May we reach out to those around us so that all may see the light of Christ in these dark times.
Stay safe and may God's blessings be with you.

The Apostles' Creed

And now let us affirm our faith with the words of the Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Prayers

Officiant The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Officiant Let us pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, ,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

A Collect for Guidance

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Collect for Mission

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. *Amen.*

Open prayers

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. *Amen. Ephesians 3:20, 21*