

March 22, 2020, The 4th Sunday in Lent

Parts of this service marked with an asterisk () may be led by one person.*

Invocation

* We worship as we live, in the name of the Father,
the Son (†), and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Confession *(Read together)*

God who is love, we come admitting the brokenness in our lives:
the brokenness between ourselves, the brokenness between nations,
the brokenness between humanity and creation.
Give us the courage to acknowledge this pain.
Give us the faith to trust your presence.
Give us the desire to share your healing,
promised and provided in Jesus Christ (†) our Lord. Amen.

Hymn - Christ Be Our Light *(Read or sung together)*

(Lyrics printed under OneLicence # 731166-A)

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to You.
Make us Your own, Your holy people,
Light for the world to see.

Chorus

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in Your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us.
Make us your living voice. *Chorus*

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us Your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed. *Chorus*

Longing for shelter, many are homeless
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us Your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone. *Chorus*

Many the gift, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Signs of your kingdom come. *Chorus*

Prayer of the Day (*Prayer used by permission of Augsburg Fortress*)

* God is with us. Let us pray.

Bend your ears 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

* The Holy Gospel according to John.

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 neighbours 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 Jewish leaders 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 Jewish leaders; 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 Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection

* We continue the practice of asking questions of Jesus. These days, they might run something like this.

"Teacher, who sinned? The Chinese? The Italians? Travellers? Hoarders? Foreigners? People who disregarded travel advisories? People who didn't stay in quarantine? Who can we blame for this pandemic?"

And I suspect that Jesus would respond the same way he did all those years ago.

"No one sinned to bring this about. It just happened. Stop looking for someone to blame; the community is divided enough, and I am calling you to unite it in love. Use the eyes of faith, and look for God's presence in the middle of it, bringing healing, bringing peace, bringing a call to serve the sick and isolated."

One example.

A restaurant in Lunenburg was shutting down this week because of the pandemic. But orders for supplies had already been sent, and the truck was on the way.

But instead of refusing delivery, or putting it all in storage for later, the restaurant owner sent the entire load to our local Food Bank. Every last cracker.

"Look for God's presence in the middle of it, bringing healing, bringing peace, bringing a call to serve the sick and isolated."

Jesus doesn't turn away from us because of our fearful questions. But he does refocus them, turning us from our self-serving, self-excusing approaches, to move us to concern for our neighbour, our community, and our world. And especially, to the primary concern for how and where God is doing things in our world.

May we admit our blindness to this primary concern, that Christ may enable us to truly see.

Prayers

* Acknowledging our broken world, we come to God in prayer, asking for faith and healing.

God who gives sight to the blind, we confess that there are many things we do not see; the pain of our neighbours, your love for our enemies, your welcome of strangers. Open our eyes. In your unbounded mercy,

Hear our prayer.

God who brings healing to the sick, we offer our heartfelt thanks for those who bring your healing: doctors and nurses, first responders and volunteers. Show us how we can support them in your healing work. Open our eyes. In your unbounded mercy,

Hear our prayer.

God who restores us to community, in this time of isolation and fear, we ask for courage and faith. Show us new ways to care for the people around us, that even as we practice social distancing, we may not give in to social isolation. We especially remember those who work so that we may have food and safety. Open our eyes. In your unbounded mercy,

Hear our prayer.

God who calls your church to serve, we thank you for leaders who lead, for servants who serve, for the quiet who go about their ministry in the invisible corners of life. Strengthen us to respond with love and compassion to these difficult times. Open our eyes. In your unbounded mercy,

Hear our prayer.

God who challenges our self-centredness, you call us to act on behalf of others. We remember all those who are isolated, who are fearful, and who are sick, especially those we name before you.

[Names of those who are of special concern may be offered.]

Open our eyes. In your unbounded mercy,

Hear our prayer.

God who sends your church to the world, we are afraid, yet we are called. Increase our faith. Open our eyes. In your unbounded mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Trusting the promise of mercy, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who taught us to pray,

Lord's Prayer (*Prayers used by permission of Augsburg Fortress*)

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.

OR

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are your, now and forever. Amen.

Benediction (*Read together*)

May almighty God,

The Father who created us to live in love,

The Son (†) who died and rose to bring us new life,

And the Spirit who opens our eyes to each other, and ***all*** others,
bless us all, now and forever. Amen.