

AT HOME WORSHIP – March 22, 2020

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP – Take a minute or two of quiet to prepare for worship **CALL TO WORSHIP**

Sight is a gift from God and we are given a variety of ways to see.

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of vision.

We acknowledge that we may be blind in ways other than the physical.

Help us, Lord, to search ourselves to discover the blind spots within us.

In the darkness of perceptual blindness we see with only our own ideas, opinions, and beliefs.

Forgive us, Lord, and give us insight to see beyond our own perceptions.

In the darkness of spiritual blindness we fear the unknown and search for meaning.

Forgive us, Lord, and give us vision that focuses on you and your presence in our lives. AMEN

A BRIEF CONFESSION

In honesty of heart and humbleness of spirit, we come before God in confession.

You search us, O Lord, and you know us well.

We seek your pardon, we ask your forgiveness, we need your mercy.

Forgive us where we've failed, heal us where we are broken.

Cast us not away from your presence. Renew a right spirit within us.

Our faith in the living Christ assures us that God's pardon is real, God's healing deep. AMEN.

GREETING

The Lord be with you

We pray for our worship to fill us with spiritual insight.

May God our Creator, Jesus our Healer, and the Holy Spirit our Guide give us vision today.

WORD

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1st reading – Ephesians 5:8-14

For 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.'

2nd reading – Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Gospel reading – John 9: 1-41

As he 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 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 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 Jews; for the Jews 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 worshipped 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.

SERMON

4th Sunday of Lent

John 9:1-41

SENT



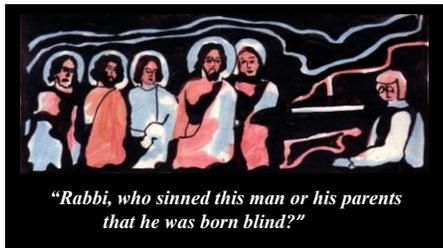
Congratulations to all of us, we've just read the whole ninth chapter of John ... a little long for reading in a worship service, but it's a great story that captivates us ... right, draws us in, it is a story that has movement, it builds in suspense, and concludes with the climatic words

And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.
- John 9:38

of the blind man who was healed – “*Lord, I believe*”(John 9:38)

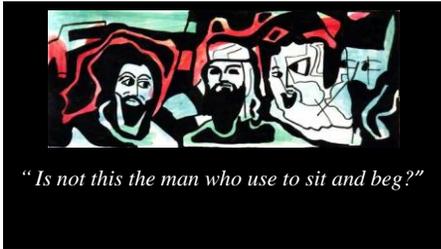
There are any number of ways you can dive into this story to glean some spiritual wisdom and learn what God may be seeking to teach us.

The obvious one is about being blind and being given sight ... it can be a metaphor for how we travel through life sometimes with “blind spots”, for which we need God's healing so that our faith can take on a wider field of vision.

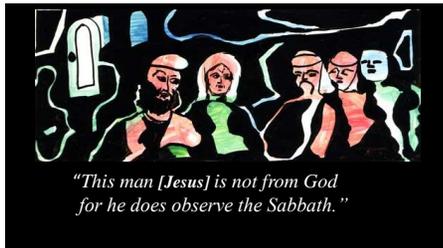


Another place to dive into this story

is to look at the danger of perceptions ... The disciples perception of things was tied to always looking for a reason why bad things happen to people – they asked Jesus, “*who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?*”

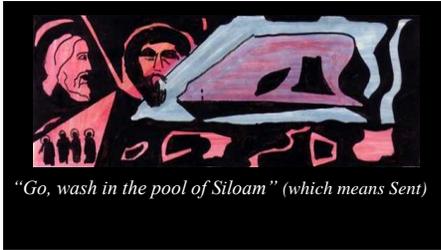


The neighbors perception of things is chained to the past – they could not get beyond the idea that they had always (**from his birth**) known this man to be blind.



The Pharisees are stuck in their religious perceptions that keep them from seeing God at work, “*This man [Jesus] is not from God for he does observe the Sabbath*”, they said

All these are good ways to engage the story, but let me introduce you to another option I’m drawn to this pool called the Pool of Siloam, we are told that it means “sent” ... but so what, it surfaces nowhere else in the story.



But if we look at this story in the context of the whole Gospel of John from which it comes ... the idea of "*being sent*" is central from beginning to end:

Being Sent

God sends John the Baptist, spoken of in the first chapter, the 6th verse to bear witness that Jesus is the light of the world ... *There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came ... to testify to the light.*"

God sends his son that "*whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life*" – John 3:16 probably the most well-known verse in the Bible.

Jesus sends the disciples as the Gospel of John winds to a close ... he sends them out with the gift and the power of the Holy Spirit – "*As the father has sent me, so I send you*"... he says.

So, it's no coincidence

that the pool in which the blind man washed, the pool to which Jesus told him to go, is called "*Sent*".

In the Greek language of the New Testament, the word sent is *apostelló* which is the word from which "apostle" comes - apostle means, "*one who is sent*"

Siloam (Sent)

Greek – apostelló

Hebrew – Shalah

To be Jesus' apostle, is to be one who is sent out into the world to continue the ministry of Jesus

Now the word *Siloam* itself is a

Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name *Shiloah* ... and *Shiloah* comes from the Hebrew verb (*shalah*), which means to send out.

OK ... that's probably more than you want to know, but

I find it very interesting that the pool to which Jesus directs the blind man to wash is a pool

bearing the name "Sent" ... **Could it be that when you experience God in your life (as the blind man did), could it be that you are in some way sent out to live in such a way that God is made known through you?**

Since the blind man is so central

to this reading today ... there must be clues for us in who he is and what he does that can give us some insight about the ways of God in sending us out to be servants in the world.

We really don't know who

this blind man is ... we don't know much about his life other than that he was born blind; we don't know of all the trials and difficulties he endured because of it; we don't know any of the specifics of what he did after he was healed, except that he proclaimed belief and worshipped God.

So, let's take a look

at what we can know about him: In a world where power structures order how life will go ... the blind man is at the bottom of the food chain.

In a world where strength is admired and striven for ... the blind man is a ninety pound weakling.
In a world where appearing to be a good, moral, and upright person is important ... the blind man is perceived to be of questionable virtue & value.

And this is the one who Jesus chooses

to be the vehicle by which God's power and purpose is to be made known; this is the one whom we can say God sends into the world after his experience with Jesus.

What can we learn

What can we glean from that?

What is the message we can take from it?

What can we learn about God here?

WEAKNESS ... God chooses *weakness* to reveal that our perspective and God's perspective as to what brings about the change in the world that God desires – these perspectives don't line-up very well ... we think power & might will bring change, God says, "NO", compassion & mercy brings change.

God chooses *weakness* to show that real power lies (not in our construction and understanding of it) but in God's ways of mercy & compassion.

God chooses *weakness* to say that the "so called" soft attributes of compassion and mercy ... these "soft attributes (**if that's what you want to call them**) these are essential to understanding God.

WEAKNESS
our weakness can become the
POWER OF GOD

Weakness is power in God's eyes ... For in our weaknesses, the power of God *the has room* and *the space* to work through us.
The powerful, they tend to be more full of themselves and God's power is seen as ... well, not being needed so much.

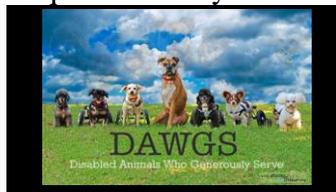
Our **weaknesses**
are **POWER**
in God's eyes

Our weaknesses are power in God's eyes.

I heard about this story on the CBS that I'll never forget ... it's a "dog story", but

I think it illustrates the faith & spiritual principle that in our weaknesses, God's power can reside for changing lives with mercy and compassion.

It's about an organization called Dharma Rescue located in Southern California and founded by Susan Fulcher ... one of their posters sums-up their mission quite succinctly



DAWGS – Disabled Animals who Generously Serve.

Let me tell you the story of one of their rescues:

They were given one little terrier who used to go by the name Cry Baby. It made sense given how much pain he had endured. He was hit by a car,” said Susan Fulcher. **“His back was broken.”His two hind legs were paralyzed and after surgery, his owners no longer wanted him**”. But Susan Fulcher did.



She gave him a new home and a new name ... Presley. This isn't just about keeping the dogs alive; it's about helping them really live. **“That's what we do and we do it well,”** Fulcher says. She fits her paralyzed rescues with a custom doggie wheelchair. **“With just two working legs and a pair of wheels, they're now on a roll”**, she says. When asked, **“What kind of reaction do the dogs have when you put wheels on them ... “They immediately take off,”** Fulcher replied. This kind of thing is something Susan Fulcher has done more than 25 times since the founding of Dharma Rescue in 2013

For Presley, she trained him not only to “roll” proficiently, but also trained him to be attentive toward those with special needs like himself

**Presley ... being a
compassionate
and
happy friend**



After the proper training, many of these rescues have become therapy dogs. They visit schools to provide stress relief for kids with learning disabilities, behavioral problems and autism. They visit skilled nursing facilities providing comfort and joy to the disabled elderly. **“It is terrific and magnificent,**



Fulcher says, *“that these dogs have a purpose in life, after they are hurt, unwanted, too weak and disabled to be considered of value to many”*. At the Dharma Rescue, the dogs are given a second chance. Fulcher was asked about the satisfaction there is in seeing the dogs give back to other people? *“Indescribable. In this world right now, she said, we really need to think about giving more, about caring more ...and that despite our limitations and weaknesses, we are capable of so much more.”*

WEAKNESS, a vehicle for God's
STRENGTH to change lives with the
POWER God's compassion
&
mercy

WEAKNESS ... in God's eyes,

weakness is full of potential to be a vehicle for God's STRENGTH to change lives with the
POWER of compassion and mercy.

In our society and times today,

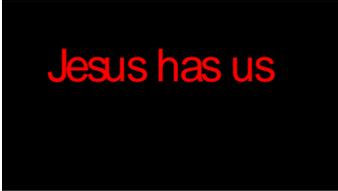
it takes energy and will,

it takes money and resources, and most importantly

it takes the spirit of God's compassion & mercy in us ... to work with our weaknesses and the
weaknesses of others to make room
for the power of God to become

manifest in our deficiencies & fragility.

Jesus doesn't walk the streets today healing the blind and making the cripple whole, but



Jesus has us

Jesus has us ... Jesus has us, with all our weakness and deficiencies,
Jesus has us, who can offer our imperfections for service to God,
Jesus has us, who can embrace the frail with mercy & compassion,
Jesus has us, who with our weakness (like the blind man) are sent to become
vehicles of God's power proclaiming our belief in a God who calls us to serve. AMEN

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We believe in God, who has created all things and continues to create new life within us.

We believe in Jesus, sent by God to reveal the depth of divine love. By his life, his death and resurrection we live as a renewed and hopeful people who experience joy and abundance of life.

We believe that the Holy Spirit is present, now and always, calling us to faith, giving us gifts, and empowering us for service. AMEN

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pray for God to use us and that where there are weaknesses in us ... pray that God use them for good to serve others

Pray for the world ... for peace and healing, for the hungry

Pray for the people of Bethany, our Grand Canyon Synod, The ELCA

Pray for all of us in this difficult time of the Corona Virus and those ill with the virus

Offer your own prayer concerns

OFFERING – **Please mail your weekly offering to the church** (thank you)

PRAYER OF BLESSING

God of all bounty and love; we give, as a thank offering, gifts we have first received from your hand. We now return a portion of our blessings for the work of our church and the ministries we do in your name. Bless these offerings into actions that proclaim your love, mercy and compassion. AMEN.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

SENDING

BENEDICTION

*The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. AMEN*

DISMISSAL

With spiritual vision, we move out into the world to be expressions of God's love and peace. Lord, give us this vision always to be your servants. Thanks be to God.