

OPEN OUR EYES TO SEE
Sermon for the 4th Sunday in Lent, 2020
John 1:1-41

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, John 9:1-41: ¹ While Jesus was passing by, He saw a man who had been blind from his birth. ² His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

³ Jesus answered, “Neither has this man sinned, nor have his parents sinned. Rather, he is blind that the works of God may be revealed in him. ⁴ We must do the works of Him who has sent Me while it is day. The 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 After He said this, He spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva and anointed the man’s eyes with the mud. ⁷ He told him, “Go! Wash yourself in the Pool of Siloam!” (When translated, the name is “Sent”).

The man went, washed himself and came back seeing.

⁸ His neighbours, therefore, and those who used to see him previously as a beggar asked, “Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?”

⁹ Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He himself kept saying, “I am the one.”

¹⁰ Therefore, they kept asking him, “How, then, have your eyes been opened?”

¹¹ He answered, “The Man who is called Jesus made some mud, anointed my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash yourself!’ Therefore, I went and washed myself and I received sight.”

¹² They asked him, “Where is He?”

He answered, “I do not know.”

¹³ They brought the man who had once been blind to the Pharisees. ¹⁴ The day was a Sabbath when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Therefore, the Pharisees also kept asking him how he had received his sight. The man told them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed myself and I see!”

¹⁶ Therefore, some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.” Others were asking, “How can a man who is a sinner do such miraculous signs?”

There was a division among them. ¹⁷ Therefore, they asked the blind man again, “What do you say about Him? For He has opened your eyes.”

He answered, “He is a prophet.”

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²⁰ Therefore, his parents answered, “We know that he is our son and that he was born blind. ²¹ However, we do not know how it is that he now sees or who has opened his eyes. Ask him! He is of age. He will tell you about himself.”

²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews. For the Jews had already agreed to put out of the synagogue anyone who confessed that Jesus was the Christ. ²³ That is why his parents said, “He is of age. Ask him!”

²⁴ So, they called a second time the man who had been blind. They told him. “Give glory to God! We know this man is a sinner.”

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²⁷ He answered them, “I have already told you, and you have not listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Can it possibly be that you also want to become His disciples?”

²⁸ They answered him insultingly, “You are that Fellow’s disciple. We are Moses’ disciples. ²⁹ We know God has spoken to Moses, but as for this Fellow, we do not know where He is from.”

³⁰ The man answered them, “Well, the astonishing thing in this is that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but, if anyone worships God and does what God wants, God listens to him. ³² Since the beginning of time no one has ever heard that anyone has opened the eyes of a person who has been born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, He could not do anything.”

³⁴ They answered him, “You were completely born in sins and are you trying to teach us?”

Then they cast him out. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out. When He had found him, He asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

³⁶ The man asked, “Who, then, is He, Sir, that I may believe in Him?”

³⁷ Jesus told him, “You have both seen Him, and He is the One who is talking with you.”

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³⁹ Then Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see and that those who see may become blind.”

⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard this. They asked Him, “Surely we are not blind, too?”

⁴¹ Jesus told them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin. However, now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“**Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?**” That was the question the disciples put to Jesus as they passed by a man **who had been blind from his birth**. It seemed like a very reasonable question – and not just to them: a lot of people were grappling with the same question, a question that many believed, namely, that suffering was the result from a specific sin. So it was that to the disciples and others, this man’s blindness was punishment for a particular sin of his parents or some sin he had committed in the womb. This man’s blindness had to be the result of *someone* doing *something* terrible. It would *have to have been* something *especially* despicable to warrant such a dreadful curse.

The question was difficult. If the man’s own sin had somehow caused his blindness, how could he have so sinned while still in the womb? If his parents’ sin had caused it, that seemed *unfair*. Still, the disciples thought that one or the other was true and that anyway you looked at this, it didn’t look like God was being fair – and no one wanted to accuse the Lord of being anything but perfectly just. So, the whole question was a real conundrum, *except to Jesus*.

Jesus told the disciples that they were not looking at the situation correctly. They imagined that they knew what the Lord was up to – as if they could see through His eyes – and that this man’s blindness was a manifestation of divine justice and punishment for sin. However, the truth is that they *didn’t see*. Because of their faulty assumptions and way of worldly thinking, and their arrogance in pretending to see through the eyes of the Lord, they were blind to the truth.

So Jesus explained what the truth was – which was a real eye-opener for His disciples. ³ **Jesus answered, “Neither has this man sinned, nor have his parents sinned. Rather, he is blind that the works of God may be revealed in him. ⁴ We must do the works of Him who has sent Me while it is day. The night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.”** That’s an entirely different way of seeing things and requires a bit of explanation.

The people had been assuming that the work of God *was* on display in this man; namely, God’s work of justice – His punishment of those who do evil. That’s why they thought this man’s blindness was the result of someone’s sin. However, the truth is that this fallen world does not operate according to God’s justice – at least, not at present, and for that we are incredibly grateful; because if all there were was God’s justice – if that’s what we saw – then every sinner who ever lived, including all of us, would already be condemned to an eternity in hell. We would be cast into outer darkness where there is gnashing of teeth¹ and would see nothing: no light, no goodness, no end of pain and suffering; just everlasting separation from the gracious presence of God.

But that’s not what we see. Instead, we see this world continuing in its fallen state. We see the Lord withholding His hand of judgment. We see sin as not being instantly punished. What we do see at present is not God’s justice, but His mercy. We see His forbearance, His patience, His kindness, and His gentleness as with great longsuffering He calls sinners to repentance, to forgiveness, and to life through faith in Jesus, His Son. In short, what we see is God’s love in Christ operating in this fallen, imperfect, and often tragic world, where things are not the way they were created to be, and where the curse caused by our sin is in full effect, so that we shall see the brokenness and futility of life under sin’s curse and long to be free of it, to be saved from it, and to be restored and made whole again in Christ.

That’s what’s really going on all around us. The problem is that we like the first view of things better - the one that says that what we’re seeing is God’s justice. Why? Because for most of us most of the time things are going well. Generally speaking, we are not completely physically blind, sick, suffering, or in poverty and misery. From an individual point of view, in a world that operates according to God’s justice, surely that must mean that the Lord is pleased with me and my behaviour. He smiles at me and rewards me for that good behaviour. It means *I am not a sinner* – at least not so bad a sinner

¹ Luke 13:28

as to incur the wrath of God.

Being sinners, by our very nature, we prefer this view of things because *it avoids the inconvenient truth of my sin*, which I'd rather not see. No, the sinners are the ones whom God punishes with blindness, poverty, misery, and so on. It's the other person. My life is pretty good; therefore *I* am pretty good, and because that's the way I see things – because I'm blind to my sin – when something in my life goes bad, I can shake my fist angrily at the Lord and say, “*Why are You treating me this way? You're not being fair!*”

Does that sound familiar? Have any of you ever felt that way? It's because you were born blind in sin. All of us were, that's why Jesus' work on this blind man is so instructive to us – it displays for us the work of God.

Notice how it is Jesus that initiates the healing. He approaches the blind man, not the other way around. He seeks and saves the lost.² The lost do not find Him. Then Jesus did something rather strange: He “**spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva and anointed the man's eyes with the mud.**” Why didn't Jesus simply do as He had done at other times to other people, and simply touch this man to heal him? Why make mud?

While we'll never know for sure, this action of Jesus does remind us of something that happened way back and recorded for us in Genesis 2, when the LORD God formed the first man from the dust of the earth. Here, He is recreating for this man what was lost, as it were, with a mixture of dust and moisture that has come straight from the mouth of the Lord. That sounds rather baptismal, by the way; and if there's any doubt about it, Jesus then says to him, “**Go! Wash yourself in the Pool of Siloam!**”

That too, should strike us as strange. John explained that Siloam means “sent.” Perhaps it was named that because the pool, located on the southern end of Jerusalem, served as a source of water that was sent into the city through a tunnel system built by King Hezekiah. Anyway, it was not close to where Jesus and the blind man was, so this poor fellow had to stumble down streets and through crowds to the Pool of Siloam. Again, Jesus could have healed him on the spot. Or He could have chosen a closer pool of water, like Bethesda, which was very close by. And keep in mind - Jesus has said nothing about healing the man. One minute this man is sitting there begging as he always had done, and along comes this stranger (he doesn't know who Jesus is), who then smeared mud in his eyes, and told him to get washed. Amazingly he went as directed to Siloam and washed. Suddenly, for the first time in his life, he can see. His eyes are opened, and he goes forth talking about Jesus and what He has done, though at first, his understanding is sketchy at best. He can see physically, but spiritual sight comes to him in a series of steps. What's interesting is that it's the spiritual blindness of others that helped him to see the truth. At first, he returned home. “**8 His neighbours, therefore, and those who used to see him previously as a beggar asked, “Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He himself kept saying, “I am the one.”**

Some denied what they saw and heard. Why? Because it didn't fit their world view. Remember? From their way of looking at things, he was blind because of sin. In some way or another, he deserved to be blind: unlike me. So if he's healed now, it messes up my whole understanding of God's way of dealing with the world. Therefore it can't be the same man.

This comes into even clearer focus when the man is taken before the Pharisees. They are outwardly the best and most righteous people around – and therefore the most blind to their own sins. “**15 Therefore, the Pharisees also kept asking him how he had received his sight.**” The man explained what Jesus said and did. This caused division among the Pharisees who even claimed that this was proof Jesus was a sinner “**...because He does not keep the Sabbath.**” Jesus had violated the rabbinic rules concerning the Sabbath since the rabbis listed kneading dough among 39 forms of work forbidden on the Sabbath, a law thought also to cover the mixing of earth and saliva.

17 Therefore, they asked the blind man again, “What do you say about Him? For He has opened your eyes.” He answered, “He is a prophet.”

It's true, and he's getting closer, but it's an incomplete confession of who Jesus is. He doesn't see the whole truth just yet. The argument continued among the Pharisees. The deniers began to insist that he must not really have been born blind, so they called in the parents to testify. **19 They asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? So, how does he now see?”**

20 Therefore, his parents answered, “We know that he is our son and that he was born blind. 21 However, we do not know how it is that he now sees or who has opened his eyes. Ask him! He is of age. He will tell you about himself.”

22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews. For the Jews had already agreed to put out of the synagogue anyone who confessed that Jesus was the Christ. 23 That is why his parents said, “He is of age. Ask him!”

So the Pharisees called the man back in, who's had a bit more time to think about all he had seen and heard. Again the

² Luke 19:10

Pharisees accused Jesus of being a sinner, to which the man said, **“I do not know whether He is a sinner. One thing I know, that, although I was blind, now I see.”** Their arguing continued, and the more it did, the more the man became convinced that what Jesus’ detractors were saying did not ring true. He began to see their blindness in *refusing to acknowledge that Jesus had indeed been sent from God and is doing His work.* When asked again, he confessed the truth he’d come to see. **“Well, the astonishing thing in this is that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes.”** ³¹ **We know that God does not listen to sinners, but, if anyone worships God and does what God wants, God listens to him.** ³² **Since the beginning of time, no one has ever heard that anyone has opened the eyes of a person who has been born blind.** ³³ **If this man were not from God, He could not do anything.”** For his bold confession, he suffered expulsion, **“You were completely born in sins and are you trying to teach us?”** Then they cast him out. Thus the Pharisees prove the old proverb: *There are none so blind as those who refuse to see.*³

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, so He went to the man to reveal Himself fully and to complete what was still lacking in this man’s faith. Even though this man had laid his eyes on the One who had healed him, he did not, as yet, recognise Jesus. **“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”** Jesus asked. ³⁶ **The man asked, “Who, then, is He, Sir, that I may believe in Him?”** ³⁷ **Jesus told him, “You have both seen Him, and He is the One who is talking with you.”** ³⁸ **He said, “I believe, Lord,” and worshipped Him.** The man confessed his faith and *worshipped* Jesus. In other words, he acknowledged Jesus as his Saviour and his God. His confession was now complete. Now he truly saw the One who is the truth for who and what He is.

This is the work of God being displayed in him: his coming to see the Lord Jesus for who He is and being restored by Him. The thing to understand is that this same work of God is in progress in each of us because we are all born spiritually blind in sin. We don’t see as we should. We only think we do, and what Jesus did for this blind man, **He does for all of us.**

How? In the same way He did it in the story. He comes to us where we are. He finds us when we are unable to seek Him, and then He begins His re-creating work in us first through Baptism. It’s there that He reveals our guilt, brings us to repentance, and washes away our sins; He opens our eyes of faith and gives us His Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts and minds. Then through various trials of opposition and through His disclosure of Himself through His Word, we come to know Him better. As we mature in the faith, we come increasingly to see who He really is, our faith is refined, and we learn to confess His whole truth and to worship Him. This is an ongoing process. It’s what being a disciple is all about – learning to know Jesus and learning to see things correctly by the light of His truth.

We then, go forth doing the works of God – just as Jesus said, **“We must do the works of Him who has sent Me while it is day. The night is coming when no one can work.”** *“But hang on”* you may say, *“How can I do the works of God? I can’t heal anyone who was born blind.”* No, you can’t. But there’s a lot more to the work of God than that. Recall that what the Lord is doing *now in this time,* which is the Day of Grace. He is dealing with the world in His mercy, not His judgment. This, we can do. Just as the Lord was dealing with blind sinners in mercy, patience, kindness, forgiveness, gentleness, and love, so can we. There are plenty who need our acts of love, mercy, and kindness the most. In Christ, we now know to see them not as the subjects of God’s punishment - as did the disciples and the Pharisees; but rather as opportunities the Lord gives to us to serve. We do God’s work by showing them God’s love in Christ by providing for their needs, helping them, and making up for what they lack with charity and kindness. So it is that we shall be doing God’s work in the world.

That *will* help to open the eyes of the spiritually blind. In our confession of Jesus, in our sharing His Word and proclaiming what He has done for us, and also in our acts of love for each other and especially for the disadvantaged, people will come to see and know Christ as we do. Their eyes will also be opened to Jesus and His truth, and they too will come to know Him as Saviour and Lord.

This is what Paul said in today’s Second Reading: *“For once you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Live as people who belong to the light!”* (Ephesians 5:8). May He who has called us out of darkness and has given us the gift of spiritual sight, give us also the grace to walk as children of Him who is the Light of the world. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Lord, We praise You for all Your loving kindness. We rejoice that You have rescued us from darkness and eternal death, and blessed us with Your love, light, and life. We thank You that You have not punished us as we deserve, or repaid us for our sins. In Your love You have given Your only Son to carry our sins and to suffer for our transgressions, that we may not

³ This proverb reminds us of what was spoken in Jeremiah 5:21, *“Please listen to this, foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear!”*

perish, but have eternal life. We thank You that through Him we can approach Your throne, confident that there we shall find mercy and help in every need. Give us daily joy in Your free forgiveness for all our sins, and in all the endless blessings of the Gospel.

O Lord, You are mindful of the needs of all people. You give daily bread to both the godly and the ungodly alike. We praise and thank you for supplying all our bodily needs. Enable us to use the lives You give and sustain to show forth Your love and care. Grant us the continuing gift of health, that we may serve You with joy through Him who is the bread of life, even Jesus Christ.

Gracious Heavenly Father, Creator and Preserver of all things, we come before Your throne of grace on behalf of our families and friends, ourselves and all in our world who feel the fear of contracting the latest outbreak of a coronavirus. Strengthen our bodies and spirits, that we may be spared this sickness. Give wisdom and knowledge to doctors, nurses and all who provide care for the sick and suffering as well as to our world's leaders who bear responsibility for their citizens. If it is Your will, heal those who are suffering from infection and bring the spread of this virus to a swift end. Throughout all days of trial, remind us of Your great love and the forgiveness and salvation earned for us by Your Son, Jesus Christ.

Give us opportunities to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to others who do not know it. Keep Your Church in Jesus Christ in the one true faith. Bless all schools, that all teachers may acknowledge You and serve You, and that all pupils may find in You the treasures of life and truth.

Protect us from the influence of wicked people, and preserve us in all dangers. Give Your strength to all who members of the AELC who are suffering sickness, pain, disease, or any other trouble of body, mind, or spirit. Enable them to bear their cross with faith in Him who taught us to pray: "Your will be done". In His glorious name, and for His kingdom's sake, we pray these things. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Isaiah 42:14-21

¹⁴ "I have been silent for a long time. I used to keep quiet and hold Myself back. Now I shall moan like a woman in labour. I shall pant and gasp at the same time. ¹⁵ I shall lay waste mountains and hills and cause all their vegetation to wither. I shall turn rivers into islands. I shall dry up swamplands. ¹⁶ I shall lead blind people on a road that they have not known. I shall guide them on paths that they have not known. I shall turn the darkness into light before them and the rough places into level ground. These are the things that I shall do. I shall not abandon them. ¹⁷ Those who trust in idols and those who tell metal images, 'You are our gods' will turn back and will be deeply ashamed.

¹⁸ "Listen, deaf people! Look, blind people, that you may see! ¹⁹ Who is blind except My servant or deaf like My messenger, whom I am sending? Who is blind like the one who is to be rewarded or blind like the servant of the LORD? ²⁰ Although you see many things, you do not pay any attention. Although his ears are open, he does not hear anything."

²¹ The LORD has been willing because of His own righteousness. He will make the Teaching great and will make it glorious.

Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸ For once you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Live as people who belong to the light! ⁹ For light produces everything that is good, righteous and true. ¹⁰ Approve what is pleasing to the Lord! ¹¹ Do not have anything to do with the works of darkness, from

which no good can come, but instead continue to expose them! ¹² For it is a shame even to mention the things that they do in secret. ¹³ All things that are exposed are made visible by the light. ¹⁴ For everything that is revealed is light. For this reason, it is said: "Wake up, you who sleep! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!"

John 9:1-41

¹ While Jesus was passing by, He saw a man who had been blind from his birth. ² His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

³ Jesus answered, "Neither has this man sinned, nor have his parents sinned. Rather, he is blind that the works of God may be revealed in him. ⁴ We must do the works of Him who has sent Me while it is day. The night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."

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