

The Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 22, 2020

The Collect of the Day

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.

How appropriate that this Sunday, also known as *Laetare* Sunday, happens to fall on the second day of my “shelter in place” life. This Fourth Sunday of Lent provides us with a break in all those Lenten fasts and disciplines that we have undertaken. It is to be a Sunday of rejoicing, a time of encouragement during our Lenten journey that we are almost to the end of the road. Actually, if we had pink vestments, we would take them out, shake off the dust, and wear them to gather around the Altar to share in the Body and Blood of our Lord. And there would even be flowers on the Altar. Imagine such a scene as you read the Scriptures appointed for the Fourth Sunday of Lent. (Be sure to live stream Bishop Scarfe’s service in the Diocesan Chapel, tomorrow morning at 10:00 AM. You may find it on the Diocesan FaceBook Page, the Diocesan YouTube, and the Diocesan website.).

The First Lesson I Samuel 16:1-1

It is that time again, to find and anoint the next time of Israel. That was the task at hand for the prophet Samuel. In chapter 15 we read just how well Samuel’s first choice turned out: Saul had disobeyed God’s instruction and now the kingdom of Israel would be torn from his hands and given to another. *“Until the day Samuel died, he did not go see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel.”* (I Samuel 15:35)

The first time Samuel looked for a king he used his eyes – Saul was the handsomest and tallest man of Israel. Surely the next king would be the same. So as Samuel looks over the six sons of Jesse, he is looking at the stature and the appearance. God rejects each one. “Really, Lord, not one of these handsome lads will do?” Out of desperation, Samuel ask Jesse: Is this all of your sons? Why, no, I have one more, the youngest, who is in the fields with the flocks. David with ruddy cheeks and beautiful eyes stands before Samuel, the oil is poured over his head, and David is anointed King of Israel. Keep in mind that it is not until chapter 31 that David actually takes the throne.

David is described as having God’s own heart. God saw all that was in David’s heart: his emotions, his intelligence, commitment, discernment, wisdom, and character. God looked into his soul and perhaps, He saw one that had a faithful, dancing heart.

Are you dancing before our Lord God this morning? Ask the Lord to free you up as you worship in your home Sunday morning. Dance before Him like David danced before our God as he delivered the Ark to Jerusalem. Ask the Lord to look into your heart; to open your eyes to see Him working in the midst of the chaos of COVID-19. And worship Him with all of your heart, with all of your mind, and with all of your strength, for He is your Lord.

Psalm 23

This is a song of trust and deliverance. The words speak of provision, abundance, and restoration, with God personified as a shepherd. I encourage you to read this Psalm slowly and meditate on the words. How is He providing for you? How have you experienced His abundance of mercy and grace? And, most importantly, how has He restored you, drawn you into the comfort of His love?

The Second Lesson Ephesians 5:8-14

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Thus, begins this fifth chapter of Ephesians, reminding us who we are – we are children of the Light. We once walked in darkness, but no longer. We are encouraged to make the most of every opportunity before us. Oh, and just how does that work today as we are living under the COVID-19? How can we share this Light to those around us?

Give thanks in all things. Use this time to re-connect with friends via telephone conversations, written notes, face-time phone calls, and even Zoom gatherings. (I will let you know just how well those go as the Vestry is meeting ZOOM-ly Monday evening.) How about Daily Devotions, Morning or Evening Prayer, with those you are sequestered. Be creative in being “Church”. What an awesome God we serve!

The Gospel John 9:1-41

This is the third Sunday in this Lenten season that we have read and heard the words from John. Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, one in the night, the other in the dark, coming to Jesus, thirsty for more; thirsty for that Living Water. One leaves without a drink and the other becomes a missionary/evangelist to her whole town. And today we have a man blind since birth and a little spit and mud. And there is so much more to this story than a simple miracle of sight restored. Eyes seem to be the underlying theme of the day. Remember David’s eyes being described as beautiful. And we know that David’s eyes caused him to see Bathsheba; and yet those same eyes failed to see the desire in his son’s eyes for Tamar.

Once I heard a meditation about this scene. The person sharing actually picked up mud and spit to make a mud pack and put it on her eyes. I love that God uses the ordinary like mud and spit to give sight to those who are blind. Even the man, after being healed, didn’t know who this miracle worker was. When the now newly sighted man was thrown out of the temple by the Pharisees, Jesus sought him out and asked the question, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” His eyes were opened and he still needed to be shown where to look.

And what about us? Have you, have I, been blind to His presence in our lives, in our Church, in our country? How have our eyes been opened to His glory in this time? The words of Amazing Grace seem to be ringing in my ears:

*“I once was lost, but now I’m found
was blind, now I see...
‘twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.
My chains are gone; I’ve been set free.
My God, my Savior has ransomed me.*

*And like a flood, His mercy rains.
Unending love, Amazing Grace.”*

Let us pray.

Increase, O God, the spirit of neighborliness among us, that in peril we may uphold one another, in suffering tend to one another, and in homelessness, loneliness, or exile befriend one another. Grant us brave and enduring hearts that we may strengthen one another, until the disciplines and testing of these days are ended, and you again give peace in our time; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Anglican Book of Common Prayer, p 659)