

A short service to be used at home for the Fourth Sunday of Lent, 2020.

Dear Parishioners, here is a short service that you can use this Sunday in lieu of coming to church. The readings and Sermon are included.

This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Glory to God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit: as in the beginning, so now, and for ever. Amen.

‘I am the light of the world,’ says the Lord; ‘those who follow me will have the light of life.’

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence may be kept.

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and for ever. Amen.

Prayer of the Week

Creator and Healer, root of all goodness,
working your Sabbath will in the chaos of our life:
teach us the insight that gives true judgment
and praises you wherever you are found,
making miracles from spit and mud;
through Jesus Christ, the Son of the earth. Amen. ¹

Readings: *please see your Pew Sheet*

Old Testament: 1 Samuel 16: 1.-13

Psalms 23

Epistle: Ephesians 5: 8-14

The Gospel: John 9: 1-41

THE SERMON - Lent 4 – March 22nd, 2020.

Has your world been turned upside-down by Lent yet? Just as important, has our world been challenged by Lent yet?

It is a bit of a moot point, isn't it! Certainly, one could say that our world has been turned upside down by a certain virus. So, this Lent for us could be one of the most profound of our lives, as we are forced to seek different and creative ways of being church, of not just maintaining, but growing and deepening our faith at this time.

As individuals we tend to have preconceived ideas about things, and even as a church, we have our set ways, our pet methods of going about our business. In this way, we are not at all unlike the Pharisees in the Gospel of John. Will we react the same as they did when the light of Christ touches our communities of faith?

Over the years, we have been encouraged to examine our old ways of being a church and realise we will have to change if we are to be renewed. Indeed, if we are to grow, not just in numbers but in

spirit and dedication, we must be prepared to see the world, the church, and each other with different eyes.

While this is certainly not an ideal situation, let us attempt to make the most of it.

Today's readings are all about "light" and "seeing" and "understanding" and, not falling for our preconceived ideas!

It is amazing what we take for granted in life ... particularly our eyesight. My guess is that few of us here have perfect vision, but on the other hand, none of us are actually blind. We can see, but how often do we really stop to look, to pay attention to the little things?

What do you look for in a leader? What sort of person would you choose?

Well this is the situation which Samuel is faced with in our first reading.

The story begins with Samuel grieving over the failure of the current king, Saul, to live up to expectations, and he is called to go and seek out a new king from one of the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem. Jesse's sons are tall and strong and good looking, but continually he finds himself confronted by a God who kept telling him again and again, "Not this one." Like all seekers, Samuel found himself being asked by God to look differently, to see the world in a new way. It is not until Jesse's youngest son is finally presented that God says; "Yes, this is the one!" Who would have picked the youngest to be the leader, the king?

Our psalm this morning is possibly the most famous of all psalms. Psalm 23.

"The Lord is my shepherd ..."

It struck me during the week, as I travelled with this psalm, that like many things which are familiar, so familiar, we forget to pay attention to what it is really saying to us, or what it might be saying to us NOW!

For many, this psalm is one of deep comfort. Many a time I have read it at the bed of someone who is dying, bringing great calm and peace to that person.

It is a psalm which talks about having the faith and trust in God to lead us through troubled times. A psalm we can hold on to in when everything around us is confusing and difficult.

In the Epistle today, the writer, possibly Paul or one of his disciples, talks about being called out of darkness by the light of Christ. We are encouraged to therefore live as children of the light – living lives which are good and right and true.

There is a responsibility in claiming to be a child of the light, a follower of Christ, and that is to live lives which when exposed to the light are shown to be honest, compassionate and hope-filled.

The reading finishes "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Let's stop taking things for granted, let's stop our apathy and think beyond ourselves.

In this current crisis we have seen some of the worst and some of the best examples of human behaviour. The worst in the greed-fed panic buying which has seen our supermarkets stripped of many of the day-to-day essentials. The best in communities looking out for each other, for the folk, housebound in flats and units, singing and making music and perhaps, for the first time, interacting with their neighbours!

Today's Gospel is all about sight, both physical and spiritual. At the centre is the man born blind, whose restoration to sight reveals the blindness all around him, from his neighbours and family to the religious authorities and even Jesus' own disciples. The disciples are caught up, like everyone else, in the perspectives of their own day. To them and to their contemporaries, blindness, like all physical disorders, must indicate some sort of sin.

The religious authorities could not see the power of the blind man's experience because they were too focused on the proper keeping of their religious tradition. For them, the only thing that mattered was that Jesus had violated the Sabbath by working a miracle of healing.

For the blind man's neighbours, his healing meant the rupture of a social order they had grown accustomed to. They were, in fact, so comfortable with it, they could hardly recognize him after his sight was restored.

We, as enlightened people of the 21st century, might be tempted to think that we know better. But do we? Despite our medical advances and a culture that prides itself on its "tolerance" and sensitivity, we, just like the neighbours and the religious authorities, have our own limitations of sight. Are we not caught in the same conventions that Samuel found himself in as he reviewed Jesse's children? Samuel's first inclination was to see a potential new king in the tallest and strongest of the boys.

This Sunday, our Lenten journey reaches a place where we are called to acknowledge our own blindness and seek Jesus' healing touch. But this kind of seeking is risky, because it has the possibility of turning our neatly ordered worlds upside-down. The man born blind in today's Gospel finds himself in unusual and unexpected places. Before, he was a beggar, scraping out a living on the fringes of society. After encountering Christ, he becomes unrecognizable to his neighbours and finds himself witnessing about the power of God in the court of the religious authorities.

And how would the world look if we allowed Jesus to heal our blindness?

We might see leadership emerging in strange and unexpected places. We might hear God speaking through the voices of those who have been residing on the margins of our communities. We might find new ways of relating to God and each other - ways that we had not imagined before, and ways that might bring new life to our ministries, to our communities, and to the peoples around us.

Right now we are being called to lift the veils of our own conventional ways of thinking, to think "outside the box" and see that God is greater than our ways of thought and being allow. I pray that we might even discover a Spirit that we thought we had lost, a Spirit that might bring us to new ways of witnessing to the power of the Christ's light for a people we thought we could never reach.

So, our Lenten journey is indeed confronted by a great challenge today. Do we dare risk the journey of the man born blind? Do we dare venture out like Samuel did to find something new in the unlikely places? Christ is, in fact, asking us to put aside our old ways of seeing and to see, instead, through the eyes of God. And what we will see and how we will see remains a mystery until we actually dare to try - until we put our own blindness completely into the healing hands of the one who says, "I am the light of the world."

As we set out on this new journey, of worshipping in dispersion, I pray that we can see passed our preconceived ideas of what it means to be church and find our blindness removed, so we can see, understand and value those we would normally be sharing this time with and find new ways of being church and having a relationship with our God. Amen.

Intercessions:

Lord Jesus, you are the light of the world.

Shine in our lives and guide our prayers, that we may ask your mercy on all people and your blessings on the church.

Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer

We pray for the church throughout the world.

We pray for all members of the Anglican Communion: for bishops, clergy and parishioners, for chaplains in our hospitals, in places of learning, caring for sea-farers, in the prisons, Defence Forces, Emergency Services and Border Protection.

May we be filled with your love and peace and shine your light in the world in these times of change and anxiety.

We pray for all involved in outreach and ministry amongst young people, and those being prepared for baptism or confirmation.

We pray that all who are drawn to Christ will come to see you more clearly and in your light, follow you more nearly.

Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer

We pray for those who make and administer our laws and all who hold positions of responsibility, may they be honest, fair and just.

We pray for those who are working to broker peace and those who keep the peace.

We pray for all people in their daily work as well as those who are unemployed.

Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer

We commend to your keeping ourselves and each other, our neighbours, families and friends.

We ask your blessing on our communities and our homes.

Enable us by your spirit to live in love for you and for each other.

Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer

We pray for all people working in medical care and research that you will guide and protect them in their work.

We pray for people who are suffering during this pandemic and those caring for them.

We pray for those persecuted for their faith, for refugees, the vulnerable and the poor.

We pray for those in need, the poor, the lonely and the anxious, those who suffer from disabilities or mental illnesses, those who are ill, and others we name in our hearts before you now.

Give us each a heart to do whatever we can to help, and the vision to know what to do.

Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayer

We pray for families who are grieving the loss of a loved one and we commend to your keeping those whose anniversary of death occurs at this time.

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace, and rise again in glory. ²

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name,

your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Eternal God and Father, by whose power we are created
and by whose love we are redeemed;

guide and strengthen us by your Spirit,

that we may give ourselves to your service,

and live this day in love to one another and to you;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Bless to me O God

My soul that come from on high.

Bless to me O God
My body that is of earth.
Bless to me O God
Each thing my eye sees
Each sound my ear hears.
Bless to me O God
Each scent that goes to my nostrils
Each taste that goes to my lips
Each ray that guides my way. Amen. ³

References:

A Prayer Book for Australia, Sunday Morning Prayer, from p. 383.

1. Prayers for an Inclusive Church, Stephen Shakespeare, 2008.
2. Adapted from prayers from the Diocese of Canberra-Goulburn.
3. Blessing from Celtic Prayers from Iona, J. Philip Newell.