

Worship Service Bulletin March 22, 2020

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP—reading with chimes

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto me and rest;
lay down, O weary one, lay down
your head upon my breast."
I came to Jesus as I was,
so weary, worn, and sad;
I found in him a resting-place,
and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
the living water, thirsty one;
stoop down and drink and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise,
and all your day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk
till trav'ling days are done.

Text: Horatius Bonar, 1808-1889

GATHERING

GATHERING SONG *ELW 796 How Firm a Foundation*

- 1 How firm a foundation, O saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in Christ Jesus, the Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said
who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?
- 2 "Fear not, I am with you, oh, be not dismayed,
for I am your God and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand."
- 3 "When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
my grace, all-sufficient, shall be your supply.
The flames shall not hurt you; I only design
your dross to consume and your gold to refine."
- 4 "Throughout all their lifetime my people shall prove
my sov'reign, eternal, unchangeable love;
and then, when gray hairs shall their temples adorn,
like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne."

Text: J. Rippon, *A Selection of Hymns*, 1787, alt.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the holy Trinity, + one God, who forgives all our sin and whose mercy endures forever. **Amen.**

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Most merciful God,
we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned

against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. In the name of + Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith. **Amen.**

KYRIE

Response: "Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy."

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Bend your ear 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.**

WORD

SCRIPTURE SONG

SCRIPTURE **John 9:1-41**

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' ³Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The 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?' ⁹Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' ¹⁰But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' ¹¹He 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.' ¹²They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said,

‘I do not know.’

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then 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.’ ¹⁶Some 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. ¹⁷So 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.’

18 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 ¹⁹and asked them, ‘Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?’ ²⁰His parents answered, ‘We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but 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.’ ²²His 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. ²³Therefore his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him.’

24 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.’ ²⁵He answered, ‘I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’ ²⁶They said to him, ‘What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?’ ²⁷He 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?’ ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.’ ³⁰The man answered, ‘Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ ³⁴They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out.

35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ ³⁶He answered, ‘And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.’ ³⁷Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’ ³⁸He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped him. ³⁹Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ ⁴¹Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We see”, your sin remains.’

SERMON

The blame game: Alive and well in this text. Who is responsible for this man's way of life? Whose sin caused him to be born blind? Reminds me of some of the blame games going on right now. Who is responsible for this pandemic? I will admit that I have wrestled a bit with wanting to cast blame. The problem with that is that it is satisfying in the moment but then it causes a long-lasting unrest. Trying to figure out who to blame and then holding a grudge robs me of the peace that I so desperately want in my life.

So...I do not think it is healthy to engage the blame game.

Another question that comes up in times like this is: Is God punishing people? If we only read the Old Testament, we might be led to believe that disease and other disasters are the way God works. But...just as an aside and because I really don't like singular views of scripture...be aware that the Old Testament is also full of a lot of grace, as well. Back to the question though...Is God punishing people? Because of what we know of God through Jesus Christ, we know that God is about bringing life and healing. Any suffering due to sin is suffering that we bring on ourselves because of our bad choices. And is this pandemic a result of sin? I don't think so. I think it is part of being a human being on this earth. As simple and as unsatisfying as that answer might seem.

After sitting with these questions, I have to say that I do not believe God is punishing us, nor do I find it helpful to assign blame.

So what do we focus our attention on? How can we move away from these attitudes and ideas that do not bring life or healing?

Let's start by listening to Jesus:

This story of Jesus and the man who was born blind makes it clear that God has other things going on. Jesus said, "he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" To me, then, the lesson is not about our life situation so much, as it is about how God continues to work even in situations that seem less than ideal.

I visited with my Spiritual Director this week. I shared with her the things that were heavy on my heart and what was occupying my attention. And after a while of listening to me ramble on, her question was "where is God at work right now in your life?"

After a few minutes of thought, my answer to her was that God was standing behind

me pushing me forward because in reality I just wanted to crawl up on my bed and pet my dogs and pretend that everything was fine. But God isn't letting me do that. God is asking me to get to work. To care for my community. To care for myself so I can care for my community. To figure out how we are going to stay connected and encouraged. And God continues to give me strength and courage to face the next moment. Yes, I realized, God is at work in my life. I just needed to open the eyes of my heart and pay attention.

I share this with you so that you might also answer a helpful question rather than the two questions I started with: SO: Where is God at work right now in your life? Struggling to figure out where God is at work?

Here is a good place to start: Mr Rogers is famously quoted as remembering what his mother told him when he was a kid. She said when scary things happen, look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.

I think that is one of the ways we encounter God at work, particularly in these times. We look for the helpers...those who are answering God's call to love.

Another way to see the work of God is to consider all that we have been blessed with, even in this trying time. It might take a while to get to the place where you can do that. Don't beat yourself up about it. Just start with one blessing. Then add another when you can. Eventually you will begin to see your situation with hope and gratitude.

Sometimes we think we have to understand everything; to know why things are the way they are. Think of the man in this story from John's gospel. When challenged about what happened to him, he admits: "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." What if we just relied on what we already know—that Jesus has been with us through hard times before...that bad things have and will continue to happen in this world and God always comes to us to offer us comfort and love. What things do you know and see that affirm your faith and trust in God?

One thing I love about this story is the mud. How does Jesus give the man sight? By smearing mud on his eyes. It seems perfect to me. Particularly as I look back on the times in my life that were muddy...muddy with guilt, mistakes, frustration, uncertainty...in those muddy times, I think my heart vision grew clearer. Jesus used the mud to open my eyes. I was closer and more aware of what God was doing when I had reached the point when I could no longer see the way forward.

One theologian calls this "dirty theology." -- that we have a God who is always using dirt to bring life and healing and redemption, a God who shows up in the most

unlikely and scandalous ways.

After all, the whole story begins with God reaching down from heaven, picking up some dirt, and breathing life into it. At one point, Jesus takes some mud, spits in it and wipes it on a blind man's eyes to heal him.

Perhaps this is a muddy time for you. Perhaps this is an opportunity to see more clearly.

Perhaps this is a time to remember that Jesus is here for you, loving you into a new creation.

SERMON SONG **ELW 581 *You Are Mine***

- 1 "I will come to you in the silence,
I will lift you from all your fear.
You will hear my voice,
I claim you as my choice.
Be still and know I am here."

- 2 "I am hope for all who are hopeless,
I am eyes for all who long to see.
In the shadows of the night,
I will be your light.
Come and rest in me."

Refrain

- "Do not be afraid, I am with you.
I have called you each by name.
Come and follow me,
I will bring you home;
I love you and you are mine."

- 3 "I am strength for all the despairing,
healing for the ones who dwell in shame.
All the blind will see,
the lame will all run free,
and all will know my name." *Refrain*

- 4 "I am the Word that leads all to freedom,
I am the peace the world cannot give.
I will call your name,

embracing all your pain.
Stand up, now walk and live!" *Refrain*

Text: David Haas, b. 1957
Text © 1991 GIA Publications, Inc., 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638. www.giamusic.com.
800.442.3358. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**
**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**
**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH *For the Healing of the Nations*

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Let us pray:

Praise and thanks to you, holy God,
For by your Word you made all things:
You spoke light into darkness,
Called forth beauty from chaos,
And brought life into being.
For your Word of life, O God
We give you thanks and praise.

By your Word

You called your people Israel to tell of your wonderful gifts:
Freedom from captivity,
Water on the desert journey
A pathway home from exile
Wisdom for life with you.
For your Word of life, O God,
We give you thanks and praise.

Through Jesus, your Word made flesh, you speak to us and call us to witness:
Forgiveness through the cross, life to those entombed by death,
The way of your self-giving love.
For your Word of life, O God.
We give you thanks and praise.

Send your Spirit of truth, O God; rekindle your gifts within us:
Renew our faith, increase our hope, and deepen our love,
For the sake of a world in need.
Faithful to your Word, O God, draw near to all who call on you;
Through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, Amen.
Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us:

LORD'S PRAYER

SONG

ELW 779 *Amazing Grace*

- 1 Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
 that saved a wretch like me!
 I once was lost, but now am found;
 was blind, but now I see.
- 2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
 and grace my fears relieved;
 how precious did that grace appear
 the hour I first believed!
- 3 Through many dangers, toils, and snares
 I have already come;
 'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
 and grace will lead me home.
- 4 The Lord has promised good to me;

his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

5 When we've been there ten thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we'd first begun.

Text: John Newton, 1725-1807, alt., sts. 1-4; anonymous, st. 5

SENDING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Prayer Chain Coordinator—Special thanks to Connie Elmore for years of faithful service. Thanks to Sharon Harris for taking on the role of prayer chain coordinator. Please make sure that all prayer requests are sent to prayer@faithmv.net.

Continue to watch for daily emails from the church. We try to keep them short and helpful.

Keep caring for yourselves and your neighbors as best you can. Know that myself and the rest of the staff are available to offer what help we can, as well.

BLESSING May the Lord bless and keep you.

May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

SENDING SONG *ELW 768 Lead Me, Guide Me*

Refrain Lead me, guide me, along the way;
For if you lead me, I cannot stray.
Lord, let me walk each day with thee.
Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

1. I am weak and I need they strength and pow'r
to help me over my weakest hour.
Help me through the darkness they face to see.
Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

Refrain

2. I am lost if you take your hand from me,
I am blind without thy light to see.
Lord, just always let me thy servant be.
Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

Refrain

DISMISSAL Be at peace, Christ is with you.

