



Fourth Sunday in Lent  
March 19, 2023

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Well, it has been an exciting couple of weeks. The Season of Lent does not disappoint. Lent began with an Ash Wednesday offering barely a “woohoo” for the ice storm that wiped out worship in the evening and limited the crowd at noon. So, we do what we do best at Ascension – after Covid – we pivot – we get creative – we reimagine. And the First Sunday in Lent offered ashes to foreheads and a little bit of a late start to the 40 days. We offered our second bilingual new member gathering. We are expecting to receive over 40 new members between our English speaking and Spanish speaking members. The kitchen had its final installation of the last part -an additional fire alarm pull. We only wait for the city to inspect to be able to officially open the kitchen. Our first Wednesday night soup supper and bilingual worship rivaled our 8:30am Sunday morning worship attendance and I expected we were back on track. Pastor Tony preached on the Second Sunday in Lent – I left for New Orleans – and came home with Covid! Are you kidding? We lost an hour of sleep. Jesus, come on. If the ice storm on Ash Wednesday was not enough – you allow the story of Covid to unfold a second time for me. Lord, did I not get all my boosters? Have I not been a good pastor, Jesus? Do I not pray on a regular basis? Give offering? Visit the sick? Bury the dead? And what is my reward – a difficult negotiation with my doctor’s messaging service; five days of quarantine; my wife’s “less than pleased” look at being banished to the guest room; and my collegial pastor planning his commentary payback for my missing a Sunday of worship and another Wednesday night of worship – cue. Evil. Laugh. Here. Aaron Rodgers wants to play for the JETS. My March Madness bracket busted after Purdue lost to FDU (Farleigh Dickinson University – say what.) And yet here we are - healed, together, alive, neck deep into the season of Lent – counting down the days to resurrection joy. People – I might be ready! Let’s go. Empty tomb. Tears of joy. Running disciples. Mistaken identity. Call my name Jesus. I am ready for Lent to come to an end. We can try again next year. But no. I am released from quarantine but not free from Lent and neither are you. Like it or not – we are still on the journey. Tired from lack of sleep, weak from our recovery from covid, tired of doing all the work ourselves – thanks Pastor Tony, and hungry for the reminder of Easter - the emptiness of the grave – the promise of eternal life – to feel the light of the world fall on my face once again at the dawn of day of Easter with the rising of the sun.

Welcome to Jerusalem. It is where we have travelled with Jesus this day. The Pool of Siloam to be exact – the fresh water reservoir for Jerusalem to secure water for the city’s residents and deny a water source to the approaching Assyrian army when King Hezekiah expected the army to lay siege to the city in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Like the story of the woman at the well – this pool functioned as both water source and gathering place for neighbors, news, and a juicy bit of gossip. Is it any wonder that Jesus chooses this place to reveal a glimpse of God’s power? A man born blind is met by Jesus and his disciples. “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that this man was born blind?” A normal question for Jesus. The prevailing truth of the day was that people’s infirmities – their brokenness – their situation in life – was punishment from God. If you could not walk – your sinfulness could have been the cause. If you could not hear – your parent’s sinfulness could have been the cause. If you could not see – perhaps you and your parents had sinned, and God had passed judgment. It brings me joy that Jesus wastes no time in dismantling the wrongness of the disciple’s thinking. “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.” There is no mention of responsibility or blame – there is only the promise of revealing God’s power in the blind man. You know what I am going to say – this whole exchange between Jesus and the disciples about who is responsible for the man’s blindness – who sinned that God would punish? It sounds just like our favorite phrase to explain our pain away, “everything happens for a reason.” And yet, nowhere in the Bible does Jesus ever offer such a platitude. Okay moving on.



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And then my favorite part, "Jesus 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. It cracks me up that Jesus makes the blind man find the pool of Siloam. Seriously Jesus? How long has this man been blind? Since birth. Jesus made mud with his own spit. The thought is that Jesus makes his mud pie blindness eye pack on a street above the pool of Siloam. So now, not only is the man blind – but he has to mime his way down the hill to the entrance to the area where the pool of Siloam is sheltered and then navigate the crowd to find the edge of the pool to kneel down, without falling in I might add, to wash the muddy blindness from his eyes. Honest to God could not Jesus have revealed God's power at the top of the hill? Yes of course, and yet we imagine the blind man, mud falling down his face, feeling his way down the hill until he finally finds the edge of the pool. Even if we set aside Jesus and his lack of "making life easy" for the blind man attitude for a moment – why does no one celebrate?

It has a little flavor of life in our world today. When someone is healed of their illness. When someone attains their sobriety. When someone's depression is in remission. When the broken is made whole. We might give thanks for a moment – if we give thanks at all – but how easy it is for us to find the next moment of suffering to fall into once again. Even the blind man who now can see is kept from enjoying his newfound sight. Listen to the people gathered around: "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." It gets better. The Pharisees want to know what has happened. "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." 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."

Honestly, isn't that enough? The man was blind. Now he sees. Isn't that enough? Instead of finding joy in this life restored – this new life given – the Pharisees, the neighbors gathered around, even the man's parents wish to find fault, place blame, disprove the healing, deflect the gift of relationship. Even to the point that the healed man himself finds little joy in his newfound sight. This can be how life feels at times. We can be consumed by the ugliness, the betrayal, the suffering, the greed, the selfishness – all of it can and arguably should drive us to find fault, place blame, and disprove the promise of who God is and what God has done for us.

What I did not share with you was the end of the reading this day: Jesus heard that they had driven out the healed man, and when he found him, Jesus 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." And the man born blind, who had been healed of his blindness said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

People of God - In the midst of the struggle. In the midst of Covid. When we have lost an hour of sleep. When we feel like we do all of the work ourselves. When we are weak in our recovery. We are still on the journey. Jesus walks among us. Healing reveals the power of God. The sun rises. The grave is empty. Jesus speaks our name. And the promise of eternal life is given to each of us. Thanks be to God! Amen.