

Fourth Sunday in Lent  
22 March 2020

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**Ephesians 5:8-14**  
**John 9:1-7**

**Series: A Lenten Encounter with Jesus:  
Now I Can See!**

Let's begin with prayer:

God we're gathered now as your faithful people – from across the miles. We've come to worship you – we pray that you would open our hearts to your word and allow ourselves to be filled with your Spirit's power. These days are full of anxiety and uncertainty. We need to lean on you. We need you every hour, God.

We come to lay this burden that is too heavy for us to bear alone, we've come to place it before you, knowing that you are the God of help. We pray that you will speak to us today – speak to us of healing, of comfort, peace, and strength. Make us strong, we pray. Give us courage and the willingness to make sacrifices to ensure that healing happens. Come by here Lord. Come and heal our world. Amen

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Today is the fourth Sunday in Lent, our time of prayer and preparation for Easter. All our pastors are taking part in a preaching series called Encounters with Jesus. It's about people Jesus met and the astounding impact Jesus had on their lives and the world. I chose today's verses more than 6 months ago, and I've been startled by how meaningful they are to our current situation.

So listen now to the gospel from John, chapter 9, beginning at verse 1:

*As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

*Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."*

*When he had said this, he 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.*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.



Photo by Jeanette Kruezburg

Does anybody remember Peter Jennings? He was an ABC news anchor. At one point Jennings did a series of religious stories titled, “In the Name of God,” where he interviewed leaders from some new or unusual faith communities. One of the people he interviewed was a man named John Wimber. Back in the 1970’s John founded the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, it’s a Pentecostal denomination that today has over 2000 congregations.

Wimber didn’t grow up in church or in a Christian home, but he had read the Bible and it fascinated him. He also loved music and he was good at it. He was part of a number of bands, including one called The Righteous Brothers.

Sometime during his musical career Wimber went to church for the first time. He was shocked. He expected astonishing things to happen there. After attending three Sundays he approached a church usher and asked:

“When do you do it?

“Do what?” the usher said.

“When do you do the stuff in the Bible? -- You know, multiplying loaves and fish, feeding the hungry, healing sick people, giving sight to the blind ... when do you do that stuff?”

The usher smiled knowingly,

“Oh, we don’t do that. “ He said, “We *believe* in it, and we *pray* about it, but we don’t do it.”

Or ... do we?

The church exists to do the stuff Jesus did, “while he was in the world.” Our purpose is to be “The Light of the World” in his name. That means we imitate him. We try to say what he said, to think and act and feel and do as he did. To put it another way, we are a physical extension of Jesus Christ on Earth, what Paul called “The body of Christ.” We are a reflection of his light.

And his light heals – not in a single moment with a bit of mud and some water, but with prayer, loving support, and encouragement. Now, 2000 years after Jesus walked the earth, Woods and other faith communities are still feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and teaching adults and children; we minister to the sick and advocate for the vulnerable. John Wimber was right -- the church exists to “do the stuff” Jesus did, and now, especially now, in the midst of a worldwide pandemic – our role hasn’t changed.

But let’s face it -- you and I aren’t divine. If the last few days and weeks have taught us anything it’s the limit of our individual power. No one can stop this virus – but together...together we can do what Jesus did. Together we can heal the world.

I’ve read this story of Jesus healing the blind man dozens of times, and I’ve preached it pretty often too. But today is different, isn’t it? Coronavirus has opened my eyes to many things, and now I can see new truth in these verses, things I’ve never noticed before.

So in these few minutes that we have together, I want to share with you a few things that, like the man who encountered Jesus – Now I Can See!

The first one is about the blame game. Jesus makes it crystal clear that it does no good to point fingers and assign blame – it’s a waste of valuable energy. His disciples, like the rest of us, wanted to find some moral reason for the blind man’s suffering, so they asked him:

*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*

It’s natural to want to look for a cause, but when you stop and think of it, it’s a ridiculous question. If this man’s disability was a result of something he did, he would have to have done it in the womb! He was born blind!

Blaming the man doesn’t work, so the disciples move on to his parents . Did they cause his blindness?

You can feel the frustration in Jesus’ answer, “Neither of them sinned, you boneheads!” God doesn’t play tit for tat. This man was born blind so that *God’s glory might show through in him.*” How many times does that happen?! The glory of God is seen so often and clearly in people with disabilities. It happens all the time!

There’s opportunity here for even more glory. When Jesus, the Messiah, touched him, he changed him. It was God’s glory, God’s works revealed in him.

This week I’ve been thinking a lot about my grandmother. During the polio scare in the 1930’s, school was out. She let her 5-year old son, my father, go to the neighborhood pool and play with the neighborhood kids. At 5 my dad contracted polio. For the rest of her long life, my grandmother never forgave herself. She believed the disease was her fault, that her choice led to her son’s, my father’s illness and subsequent paralysis. He constantly told her it wasn’t her fault, that he was okay, in spite of his disability he was doing well -- but she never fully believed it.

My grandmother was a woman of faith. I wish she’d been able to hear Jesus say, “Quit the blame game”... hear it... not just in her ears but in her heart. Polio and Coronavirus and other diseases don’t happen as punishment for our sins and mistakes – yes, we can impact it – make it better, or much worse, but it does no good to assign blame.

Still, you know what I wish? For both their sakes – I wish she hadn’t let her little boy swim in that pool. They weren’t under a “shelter in place” order, but we may be soon. Please: if you or your children are tempted to go out into a crowd – don’t do it. Now I can say that blame is useless, but social distancing – that will save lives.

The second thing that I now can see is that we are better than we ever thought we were. We can overcome this disease by working together and staying apart. We are all hurting right now, some of us more than others – some of us are health care professionals stretched to the breaking point, some are parents trying to work from home and homeschooling their kids. Some of us aren’t getting paid, and others are afraid of losing their income. Still others know that if they contract the virus, they are at risk of severe complications.

In all of it I can see how strong we truly are – as a church and as a people. We have the strength and the structure at Woods to support each other through this crisis and anything else that comes along. Your church needs to know what you are facing. Whatever it is, we will get through it together. Call, write, text, share your prayer requests.

Now I can see how precious our freedom to worship together really is. Let's never take corporate worship for granted. While we must be apart let's remind each other that we are connected and that we are eternally and astonishingly loved!

Now I can see as never before that God is with us. We are not alone. Our situation is unprecedented, but *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

What we do right now, the way that we care for one another, and particularly the way we treat the most vulnerable among us -- these will determine our future forever. So hold fast.

Listen again to Ephesians 5:8-9:

*In the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.*

As we begin a new week of “doing the stuff” Jesus did from our kitchen tables, telephones, and computers, it is going to take a lot of courage and faith, I know, but God is with us. We are not alone.

We will be together again, and our community will be stronger than ever because we will have learned to live without shopping, and ball games, and all the things that made our lives so manic before Coronavirus. If we try, we can use this time to learn to live in new ways as children of light.

Yesterday, as I was struggling with this sermon, an angel named Lee Laque sent me a video. It's a lovely illustration of the thing I was most craving right now—community! It's a beautiful example of what we humans can do together.

Since we can't physically attend worship or a concert right now, let's do it virtually. Let's go together in our imaginations to hear the United States Air Force orchestra and chorus singing the power of us – it's called “This One Voice.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q41ctPLDHvU>