**Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 22, 2020, the Rev. David Ota**

**1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41**

The days we live in with the outbreak of the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic are life-changing. We have all witnessed what it is like to practice social distancing and to live with Sheltered-In-Place. We can no longer gather together in groups, lest we risk spreading the virus to one another and many beyond. In preparation for this inevitability many of us prepared to hunker-down and fill our homes with food and supplies.

For the foreseeable future we will not be able to gather for worship in person. This realization came to us gradually. On March 1st, we gathered for worship and shared communion using wafers instead of freshly baked bread for fear that by using home-made bread we might be more apt to spread the virus. On Sunday, March 8th, we worshipped and shared communion without the common cup for fear that we might spread the virus. And then last Sunday, we cancelled worship altogether for fear that we might spread the virus.

The realization that we must stop the spread of the Coronavirus Covid-19 with strict social distancing has only come gradually for us as a society. On Monday, March 16th the six Bay Area counties adopted the Sheltered-in-Place policy. On Thursday, March 19th, Governor Newsom issued a state-wide Shelter-in-Place policy.

Because many of the people who are infected with the Coronavirus are asymptomatic and as a nation the testing has been slow, we do not know who may be infected and might be a carrier.

So, in a sense we are blind to both the virus and those who may be infected by the virus. Because we cannot see who may be infected, we need to take action to stop the virus and the community spread by limiting our social contact for the sake of us all.

Our gospel lesson for today is the story of the man born blind and his community. His disciples saw a man blind from birth, and asked Jesus, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

It is human nature to want to put the blame on someone. We do so because it absolves us and distracts us from our own actions.

But that is not the way of Jesus. Jesus is not about blaming and scapegoating. Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus said, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” In other words, the life we are given and the circumstances we live under are opportunities for God’s works might be revealed in us.

This means with the outbreak of the Coronavirus what matters at this moment is how God will work in our lives, and not casting blame on others. How will God use us in this moment?

The man born blind had his sight restored when Jesus put mud on his eyes and he washed off the mud in the pool of Siloam, a place of healing. And when he could see, his neighbors, the religious leaders, and his parents could not understand how this could be. Some neighbors thought it wasn’t him. The religious leaders refused to believe that he was born blind, or if he was born blind, then to heal him on a Sabbath was sinful. His parents didn’t defend him to the religious authorities for fear of being kicked out of the religious community. None rejoiced with him. They only knew him, as he had known himself, a man born blind.

For the man born blind, life has changed. For us, our lives have changed too. Just as our lives changed at 9/11 and we could no longer take safe air travel for granted, so too now our lives have changed for the moment, and we can no longer take gathering in groups with our family and friends for granted.

Ironically, this pandemic has revealed how humanity is interconnected, and neither social or economic status can remove that interconnection. In response we who interconnected must stay separated for one another for the safety of all.

In the end, the religious leaders who could not accept that the man born blind who regained his sight, and whom they deemed to be a sinner was cast out of the community. Imagine, what it would be like to have your life changed for the good only to be cast out and left alone.

This is where Jesus returns in the story, and where the man born blind has God working in his life. He was alone when Jesus came and asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” Jesus told him that he was the promised one. And the man born blind believed and became a follower of him. His life was changed and he became part of a new community.

I believe this pandemic will have a major impact on us all. The pandemic will reveal what we believe about ourselves and the human community. Will the irony of our human interconnectedness revealed through the spread of the virus help us to acknowledge our blindness to human need, and how often we are separated by class, race, nationality and sex, or will it help us to recognize that not only were we blind to the virus, to those infected by the virus, but indifferent to our common humanity?

Will we allow our fear of the Coronavirus pandemic make us live to save ourselves by protecting ourselves, and storing up for ourselves riches (in this case enough toilet paper)? Or will we in good Episcopalian moderation only buy what we need so that there will still be something left for others?

There are blessings to be counted. The order to Shelter-in-Place has motivated some to want to reach out and help the more vulnerable among us. Some have volunteered to go shopping for others. In fact, my mother’s neighbor who lives across the street from her has offered to shop for her.

Jesus is the light of the world. And in the dangers of these days, may our hope be in God who provides for our needs, protects our hearts, and is always with us, even in the valley of the shadow of death.

May we in our living reflect the light of Jesus by trusting in God in the way we adjust to the new reality by caring for one another, our neighbors and those who are in need.

Amen.

**I propose to show that in the times we live in with the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic we are called to face our faithless fears seeking to save ourselves and instead having faith in God to live into a counter-intuitive response to deny ourselves and trust in one another to spare the weakest among us.**

**The Collect**

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.*

**A Prayer for Living in These Times**

Holy Jesus, You have walked the earth as we do, and you understand what we experience: the fear, the pain, the exhaustion, the loneliness, the guilt, the sorrow, the anger. You promise to be with us through thick and thin. Be with us now, and with all humanity, as we struggle with the impact of the COVID-19 virus. Draw us closer to You, that in Your companionship, our wisdom and compassion may grow. Bind us to one another, and strengthen us, that we may give and receive help from each another, and know our connectedness to all of humankind. This we ask in your name. ***Amen.***

**Old Testament**

**1 Samuel 16:1-13**

The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the Lord said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.” Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, “Do you come peaceably?” He said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.” But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

**The Response**

**Psalm 23**

***Dominus regit me***

1 The Lord is my shepherd; \*
I shall not be in want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures \*
and leads me beside still waters.

3 He revives my soul \*
and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.

4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall fear no evil; \*
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

5 You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; \*
you have anointed my head with oil,
and my cup is running over.

6 Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, \*
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

**The Epistle**

**Ephesians 5:8-14**

Once you were darkness, but now 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. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you.”

**The Gospel**

**John 9:1-41**

Narrator: 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,

Jesus: “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.”

Narrator: When he had said this, Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him,

Jesus: “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent).

Narrator: Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask,

Neighbors: “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?”

Narrator: Some were saying,

Neighbor 1: “It is he.”

Narrator: Others were saying,

Neighbor 2: “No, but it is someone like him.”

Narrator: He kept saying,

Blind Man: “I am the man.”

Narrator: But they kept asking him,

Neighbors: “Then how were your eyes opened?”

Narrator: He answered,

Blind Man: “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.”

Narrator: They said to him,

Neighbors: “Where is he?”

Narrator: He said,

Blind Man: “I do not know.”

Narrator: They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them,

Blind Man: “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.”

Narrator: Some of the Pharisees said,

Pharisees: “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.”

Narrator: But others said,

Others: “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?”

Narrator: And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man,

Pharisees: “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.”

Narrator: He said,

Blind Man: “He is a prophet.”

Narrator: 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,

Pharisees: “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”

Narrator: 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.”

Narrator: His 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. Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

Narrator: So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him,

Pharisees: “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered,

Blind Man: “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

Narrator: They said to him,

Pharisees: “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them,

Blind Man: “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?”

Narrator: Then they reviled him, saying,

Pharisees: “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”

Narrator: The man answered,

Blind Man: “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

Narrator: They answered him,

Pharisees: “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?”

Narrator: And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said,

Jesus: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

Narrator: He answered,

Blind Man: “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”

Narrator: Jesus said to him,

Jesus: “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”

Narrator: He said,

Blind Man: “Lord, I believe.”

Narrator: And he worshiped him. Jesus said,

Jesus: “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”

Narrator: Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him,

Pharisees: “Surely we are not blind, are we?”

Narrator: Jesus said to them,

Jesus: “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

**In preparation for this coming Sunday’s worship, please pray this coming Sunday’s Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below**

**Fifth Sunday in Lent: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45**

**The Collect**

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

**Old Testament**

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act,” says the Lord.

**The Response**

**Psalm 130**

***De profundis***

1 Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice; \*
let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.

2 If you, Lord, were to note what is done amiss, \*
O Lord, who could stand?

3 For there is forgiveness with you; \*
therefore you shall be feared.

4 I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; \*
in his word is my hope.

5 My soul waits for the Lord,
more than watchmen for the morning, \*
more than watchmen for the morning.

6 O Israel, wait for the Lord, \*
for with the Lord there is mercy;

7 With him there is plenteous redemption, \*
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

**The Epistle**

**Romans 8:6-11**

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law-- indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

**The Gospel**

**John 11:1-45**

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.