

punishment for sin and that no one deserves to be an outcast. He cures the man and changes his life. Notice that while his blindness is no longer the reason for the Pharisees to cast him out, they still throw him out of the synagogue for his refusal to cooperate and his simple belief in the one who healed him. It looks like the man will continue to suffer separation for his belief, but Jesus comes to him and defends him before the self-righteous Pharisees. His life is changed and he comes to believe in “the prophet.” The man’s life is a model for the process of conversion; all people of faith experience times of exclusion and times of belonging. In the end, our encounters with the Lord bring us to worship.

On another level, this story has a practical metaphorical application for John’s community. Shortly before John wrote his gospel, the Pharisees who had been driven out of Palestine when the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. had gathered in Javna. These leaders saw a threat in the followers of Jesus and had passed a resolution demanding a *berakah* (prayer) be said daily in the synagogues that condemned the followers of Jesus and cut them off from the Jewish community. The Jewish members of John’s community were deeply hurt by this imposed separation. They found themselves having to choose between their new family of Jesus’ followers and their non-believing blood families. In turn, John described his community as the new people of light who “saw” because they believed in Jesus and had confidence in the Kingdom of God ushered in by his life, death, and resurrection. Like the Essenes before them, they formed the true Israel; not the re-organized Jews under Pharisaical leadership. In contrast, according to John, the Jewish leadership’s sin of unbelief in Jesus held them in darkness, blind to their own self-deceit. That is, they acknowledged the healing power of God revealed in Jesus, yet they could not place their faith in him as Messiah. They were too focused on keeping the law (doing it the right way) to accept this unconventional manifestation of God’s power. The last two paragraphs of today’s gospel clearly make this point.

As you read the story, replace the unnamed “blind man” with the “members of John’s community”.

“All gatherings and worship at St. Paul Lutheran, Anamosa are cancelled as of March 16 until further notice. An update will be issued on April 1. Continue to pray for each other in these uncertain times.” Parish Council and Staff

Office staff will be working limited hours in the office. Please call ahead before coming into the office. When we are not in the office we will be working from home so call us there if you need to contact one of us.

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Taking it home:

- Describe the predominant characteristics of the people you look to as leaders right now? What strengths and/or weaknesses do they manifest? Do they model Christian values?
- How can people tell you are baptized when they watch you? Which Christian traits do you model for others?
- Where are you in the cycle of conversion (see commentary on John’s gospel)? Ask God to heal your blindness.
- Tell about a time you were excluded by people for trying to do the loving thing?
- Name the most powerful experience/symbol in worship that helps you feel connected to the larger community (prayers of the faithful, a cross, watching people receive communion, baptism, singing, exchanging the sign of Christ’s peace...)? Is it also found in your home/workplace/ phone/car? If not, what can you do to make it more present in your life?

Wed., March 18th & Sun. March 22nd, 2020



4th Sunday of Lent

Liturgy setting one can be found on pages 57-74 in the green Lutheran Book of Worship
All Are Welcome to commune with Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We serve the fruit of the vine under two forms: wine

and grape juice. The inner ring of the tray is grape juice. If in doubt, please ask the distributor. Gluten free hosts are available; please notify an usher before service begins.

Baptism is sometimes called enlightenment. The gospel for this Sunday is the story of the man born blind healed by Christ. “I was blind, now I see,” declares the man. In baptism God opens our eyes to see the truth of who we are: God’s beloved children. As David was anointed king of Israel, in baptism God anoints our head with oil, and calls us to bear witness to the light of Christ in our daily lives.

Prayer Concerns: Sharm Sisler, Leslie Swartz, all facing issues from the corona virus, sickness and social isolation, etc. (Names will be removed from the prayer list after four weeks unless there is a change in the person's condition. Requests need to be made by an immediate family member.)

Keep gathering your change at home each day and we will have a collection the next time we meet to benefit Sleep in Heavenly Peace.

Orders are being taken for lilies to decorate for Easter. Lilies are \$11 and will be ordered and delivered to the church. The order form is now located in the church office. Please put your money or a check to Anamosa Floral in the brown envelope. **Deadline is Sun., March 29.** Memorials or honorariums will be in the Easter bulletin.

Lenten Meals and services are canceled until further notice.

St. Paul is offering our Campership Program again this year to Children & Youth within our community. The Campership Program is intended to bring the camp experience to children and youth who would not otherwise have access to Camp EWALU. This is done through the award of **Camperships**, a scholarship to one of the Summer Camp Programs at EWALU. It includes partial tuition of \$100 for a camp program term per summer. EWALU offers programs starting with those completing 1st grade through those completing 12th grade.

- If you register through EWALU by April 20th they offer a \$15 discount
- They also offer a Sibling Discount of \$15 for each additional camper

Please email CYFM if you have any further questions or would like to inquire about a Campership for your child.

cyfmstpaulanamosa@gmail.com

The Serenity Prayer (by Reinhold Niebuhr)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, And wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time, Enjoying one moment at a time, Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace.

Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; Trusting that You will make all things right, If I surrender to Your will; So that I may be reasonably happy in this life, And supremely happy with You forever in the next.
Amen

- Step 1. We admitted we were powerless over our addiction—that aspects of our lives had become unmanageable.
- Step 2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- Step 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
- Step 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- Step 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- Step 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. **Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.**
8. **Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.**

(from the 12-steps of Alcoholics Anonymous)

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13 NIV

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king." 2 But Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me." The Lord said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' 3 Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate." 4 Samuel did what the Lord said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?" 5 Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. 6 When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord." 7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The Lord has not chosen this one either." 9 Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the Lord chosen this one." 10 Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The Lord has not chosen these." 11 So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered. "He is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives." 12 So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one." 13 So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah. ❧

How do you choose the people you wish to follow? Is your choice based on athletic ability, intellect, a well-spoken word, an angelic voice, wealth, a "sexy" body, or a poetic discourse? We are reminded in this reading that sometimes our best leaders are the least likely candidates. What is important for God's leaders is that they are like a shepherd: attentive, patient, steadfast, and willing to appear the fool in the world's eyes. Frequently, the best leaders are those who lead us through a desert experience before revealing to us the source of their strength. Sometimes they are young. David was just such a leader. Even though he was not perfect, he became the greatest king in Israel's history.

Prior to David's being anointed king, Samuel {whose name means "gift of God"} the Priest/Prophet had anointed Saul as king against his better judgment because the people had raised Saul up by casting lots (by chance). Saul promised them security as a strong military leader. Despite Samuel's support and

mentoring, Saul was unwilling to obey God's will. He chose to rely on his own power and satisfy his own desires. He became a jealous leader. His eventual downfall resulted from his inability to hear and heed God's wishes.

In today's reading, Samuel is sent to the house of Jesse near Bethlehem, of the tribe of Judah, to anoint the next king. Jesse is known to Samuel and Saul as an upstanding patriarch. David (whose name means "beloved") is not yet a man and is the least significant of Jesse's sons, but ironically fits the part of a humble hero from the start: he is handsome, ruddy, compassionate, musical, athletic, a shepherd, and the Lord was with him.... Much to the brother's chagrin, it becomes apparent to Samuel that in him, the Lord will establish the promised royal dynasty that will last forever.

Perhaps it is significant to note that the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David when Samuel poured oil upon his head and stayed with him through his life. This is the same experience Christians claim in baptismal anointing.

Psalm 23 NIV

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Second Reading: The Letter to the Ephesians 5:8-14 {NIV}

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. 14 This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." ❧

The author of this letter is following St. Paul's letter style by writing about the development of the early Christian communities into what the author called "the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church." The author sees how Holy Spirit is working through the ordered *ecclesia* or "organized church" in these four descriptive "marks."

In this particular passage, the author is focusing on that which makes the church holy, blameless, spotless, and without wrinkle: namely, baptism. Baptism expresses the changes in the way a person thinks, acts, and makes decisions when s/he is truly open to the light of Christ revealed. Truth, honesty, and integrity are pleasing to the Lord. Lies, deceit, and apathy or indifference are unfruitful works of darkness. During this Lenten Season, let us "Arise from the dead," and let the truth, who is Christ, shine on us. In this way, individually and collectively, we can bring some of the Light of Christ to the world.

Gospel: John 9:1-41 {NIV}

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

6 After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 7 "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." 10 "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked. 11 He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." 12 "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14 Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. 15 Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided. 17 Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet."

18 They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. 19 "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

20 "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. 21 But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23 That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." 25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" 26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." 40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" 41 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains." ❧

What does conversion look like in this story from John's gospel? It is going from blindness to sight. It is encountering the one who knows our needs. It is being washed in the healing waters of love. It is struggling to believe that this kind of power exists. It is being challenged to name the one who heals us. It is being sent, to testify by example. It is being cast out. It is standing face to face with the healer and saying, "I believe." It is being sent....

Jesus is confronted by the people for this healing because the Jews believed that infirmities, like blindness, were the result of someone's sin. Since this man had been born blind it couldn't have been caused by his own personal sin, so they reasoned it must have been the result of the sin of his parents or ancestors. Regardless, the man is a beggar, a person on the fringe. Jesus uses the opportunity to show that physical ailments are not