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John 9:1-41

## **There Is Still Light**

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### **OPENING PRAYER**

Holy and most gracious God, we know that, even in the midst of the chaos of our world today that you are still with us. That you hear our cries. That you are holding us tightly in your embrace. That you are giving us strength, wisdom and peace. Be with us today as we gather, though it may look different than we originally thought it would. Unite us, near and far. Fill us with hope in your promise – your promise that we are not alone, that that resurrection is real and that your love always wins. Amen.

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### **SCRIPTURE**

#### **John 9:1-41**

#### **A Man Born Blind Receives Sight**

9As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' <sup>6</sup>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, <sup>7</sup>saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. <sup>8</sup>The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' <sup>9</sup>Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' <sup>10</sup>But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' <sup>11</sup>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.'<sup>12</sup>They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

#### **The Pharisees Investigate the Healing**

<sup>13</sup>They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.<sup>14</sup>Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup>Then 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.'<sup>16</sup>Some 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. <sup>17</sup>So 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<sup>19</sup>and asked them, ‘Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?’ <sup>20</sup>His parents answered, ‘We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; <sup>21</sup>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.’ <sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>Therefore 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.’<sup>25</sup>He answered, ‘I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’ <sup>26</sup>They said to him, ‘What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?’ <sup>27</sup>He 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?’ <sup>28</sup>Then they reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. <sup>29</sup>We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.’ <sup>30</sup>The man answered, ‘Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. <sup>31</sup>We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. <sup>32</sup>Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.<sup>33</sup>If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ <sup>34</sup>They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out.

### **Spiritual Blindness**

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

### **RESPONSE TO SCRIPTURE**

This is the word of God for the people of God.

**Thanks be to God!**

## SERMON

On Thursday night, Bruce asked me how I was doing and I told him I feel like I go back and forth between being completely calm about the whole situation and being completely hysterical.

I mean, ideally I would find a place in the middle where I could settle for a little bit, but I just do not really think that is my personality.

The truth is, I think, like so many of you, my emotions are all over the place. I have been using a variety of different coping mechanisms to get me through this time, including sarcasm, which became apparent to me when I was reading this week's scripture about Jesus healing the blind man with mud and thought to myself, "Well, I wonder if they have tried that yet."

The strange part about writing a sermon in the middle of a global pandemic is that all of my usual commentaries and other research materials seem so irrelevant right now. I read everyone's thoughts on the scripture I am preaching on and there is nothing written about how it relates to social distancing or remote working and schooling or the proper way to wash your hands. There is nothing in these reflections about how to deal with the fear that comes with the virus, itself, and also the financial ramifications, the chain of supply and other medical issues that cannot be dealt with right now.

No one talks about how to proclaim the Gospel when we cannot even be around other people to do it.

One of the commentaries I use a lot is called Feasting on the Word. In the world of biblical commentaries, it is relatively "young". I think they began releasing it in 2008. It is based on the lectionary; it offers four different perspectives on each of the four verses every week. It was explained to me at one point that one of the motivating factors behind its publishing was the fact that preachers and authors and teachers really needed a commentary that was published in a post-911 world; that the world changed so much on September 11<sup>th</sup> and there was a real need for resources that reflected the world in that moment and what people were going through *then* and not prior to it.

I think that is why I now find myself struggling with the resources that I have. The world is changing – profoundly – right now. We are living through a pivotal moment, not just in our country's history, but in our world's history, as well. And that is scary, because we do not know the trajectory of this or even how long until we mitigate this situation and can begin to put the pieces back together.

And so, fear aside, it is just strange to be living life right now. I find myself watching old television shows and wondering why everyone is just hanging out together and going to stores like that is an okay thing to do.

History is being written right now – and relevance is a strange thing.

But do you know what is still relevant? The Gospel. I read these words of scripture and I think to myself, wow, these words have stood the test of time. They have remained steadfast through every pivotal and transformational moment in history. They have been through wars, plagues, upheavals, schisms, recessions, crucifixions and resurrections. These stories and their lessons and the light that shines within them have this incredible ability to speak to whatever we are going through. Including this.

Including this.

This morning's reading comes from the Gospel according to John. It is the story of Jesus healing the blind man; it is a powerful message of divine and unexplainable healing that I think we all need to hear right now.

Jesus is walking with his disciples; they had just left the temple where he had been teaching. The part I find fascinating about this story is its location in the Gospel, itself. In the prior chapter, chapter 8, Jesus is teaching in the temple near the Mount of Olives. One of the things he teaches is that he is the light of the world. He says in chapter 8, verse 12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

And so it is one thing to say that, right? For Jesus to proclaim this truth that he is the light of the world and that everyone who follows him will never walk in darkness but have light.

But now Jesus is showing people what this means.

Jesus is showing people just how bright this light is.

Jesus is showing people just intensely this light is going to transform their lives and change the world.

As Jesus is walking with his disciples, they encounter a man who is blind – he was, in fact, born blind. The disciples, assuming this man's blindness was some sort of punishment for something, ask Jesus if the *man* sinned or his *parents* did. Jesus responds by saying, "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."

In other words, this is not about this man or this blindness, but about God's power to heal.

Now, let me be clear – I am NOT saying that all of this is happening in our world today so that God's works might be revealed. I am a firm believer that we live in an imperfect world and things happen that are out of our control and very often these things are

devastating and fully reveal the depths of our brokenness. And that is where we are today.

But I also believe that God's works can be revealed in the midst of this brokenness. If you think about it, they already are. They are being revealed in the people who are working on the frontlines – who are bravely leaving their homes when the rest of us are being told to stay – so that we have access to things like healthcare, food and other essentials. They are being revealed when the most vulnerable are being cared for in creative, yet still life-giving ways. They are being revealed when we, as the church, find ways to come together, even though we are apart, and lean into one another – and our faith – during these challenging times.

Despite the uncertainty and the anxiety and the fear we all feel right now, I think we can still agree that God is with us and that we are not alone and that there is a light that is shining in the midst of this darkness.

And that light comes from Christ.

After Jesus says he is the light of the world, he spits on the ground and makes mud with his saliva – and then spreads that mud on the man's eyes (of course my first instinct is, "Don't touch his face!" but, of course, they were not in the middle of a Covid-19 outbreak). Jesus then instructs the man to go and wash the mud off in the pool of Siloam. When the man returns, he can see.

Now, there is a lot going on in this story, crucial points that I think set the stage for what is going to happen later on in the Gospel. You have Jesus healing on the Sabbath, the Jews not believing that the man had been born blind, but now could see, the formerly blind man being questioned and then driven out of the temple and, finally, the Pharisees confronting Jesus. Each and every one of these points would make a fascinating sermon. But today I want to focus on the healing, itself.

Because I think that is a message we all need to hear.

We need to hear a message of healing.

We need to believe that healing is possible.

Jesus not only gives this man his sight, but he also, quite literally, puts light in his life. Jesus says to the man and to his disciples, "I am the light of the world" and then he shows them all what this means. He takes someone's world that is physically and tangibly dark and then shines light into it.

And he promises that he will continue to do the same for all who believe in him.

Which includes us today.

Jesus says, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Friends, remember that we are resurrection people. We are living on *this* side of the resurrection; we know that this story does not end with darkness and death, but with light and resurrection. And so while we know that Jesus is not physically with us right now, we also know that, in fact, Jesus is here in this world.

And that he *is* the light.

And that his light is shining in this darkness. His light is brighter than the virus, itself, it is brighter than the uncertainty our world is facing right now and it is brighter than the fear and anxiety we are all feeling.

Imagine for a moment walking through life and not being able to see anything and then suddenly, in an instant, witnessing the world in bright, vivid and three-dimensional color. Imagine the grace you would feel in that moment – the awe, the hope. Imagine the power you would be overwhelmed by.

And then remember that *that* power is still very much at work in our world today, even though we are living through scary and unprecedented times. Remember that the light of Jesus is still shining brightly, even though we are walking through a dark moment. Remember that healing from all of this might not be found in mud, but that it can and it will be found. We do not know when or how, but remember that this story – this story of Jesus miraculously healing a blind man – has been recalled and shared and read for over 2,000 years. For centuries upon centuries, this story – this story of healing – has walked people through their darkest moments, shining light and giving them hope that healing will come.

In the moments when you feel weary – remember this story of healing. In the moments when you feel strong – remember this story of healing. In the moments when feel overwhelmed by what is happening, put down your phone and then remember this story of healing.

In this pivotal moment in our history, we need to hold onto this story – this story that has stood the test of time, this story that has declared hope in healing and this story that shows in bright, vivid and three-dimensional color just how brilliant and powerful Jesus' light is.

And friends, the world needs to see this light right now. The world needs to believe in this light. The world need to trust that this light will never be extinguished.

And that healing will happen.

I sent out a pastoral note on Thursday afternoon letting the congregation know that we are heeding the orders of Governor Baker and have extended our suspension of in-person worship, programs and activities through Sunday, April 5<sup>th</sup>, recognizing that the CDC has made longer recommendations that we will re-asses and likely adjust as this

date approaches. In this note, I reminded everyone that this is a marathon and not a sprint. We do not have to have all of the answers right away and it is okay if we adjust our plan as we go along.

Today I am going to use that same metaphor, but in a different way. This is a marathon – it will be long, arduous and taxing. But I want you to remember two things: 1. We are not running in the darkness of the night – there is a light that is shining that is illuminating our journey, a light that can never be extinguished. 2. Remember that every day that goes by, we are one day closer to be on the other side of this. I do not know how long it will take or what it will look like when we get there. But I do know what thing for certain – that light will still be shining when we get there.

Two more things:

First of all, this is my weekly reminder to take care of yourself – physically, of course, but also mentally and emotionally. Step away from the news if you have to – reach out to a friend or family member if you are starting to feel isolated. Find whatever pieces of “normal” you can find right now. This will be your light in the days and weeks to come.

Second of all, as resurrection people, we tend to focus on the *good* news in the bible – stories of healing, hope, light and love. The bible is full of stories, prophecies and poetry where people, just like us, walk through dark and scary moments in their lives, feeling the devastations of human brokenness and crying out desperately to God. And while I think sometimes, as Christians, we think we are not supposed to grieve or ask questions because it means that we are somehow not faithful enough, the truth is, we do not have to choose between our very real and human emotions and responses to tragedies and our faith. To grieve and question where God is in all of this is not a failure of our faith, but a testament to it.

I would encourage you to lean into scripture during this time. In many ways that we could never have fathomed, the hard scriptures speak clearly to what we are going through right now.

And they have stood the test of time.

They have remained steadfast.

And they do not change the truth and the grace and the hope that Christ’s light is shining through it all.

Take care of yourselves this week. I love you all.

Thanks be to God!  
Amen.