

**Service of the Word**  
The Fourth Sunday of Lent  
March 22, 2020

Concordia Lutheran Church, Manchester, CT

*Please make time at 10 a.m. on Sunday or at another time that is best for you to pray through this worship service at your home. Find a comfortable place, perhaps light a candle and place a cross nearby.*

**INTRODUCTION**

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.

**CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

In the name of the Father,  
and of the † Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

Silence is kept for reflection.

Gracious God,

**have mercy on us. We confess that we have turned from you and given ourselves into the power of sin. We are truly sorry and humbly repent. In your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things we have done and things we have failed to do. Turn us again to you, and uphold us by your Spirit, so that we may live and serve you in newness of life through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.**

**Amen.**

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.

**Amen.**

*Lord, have mercy: Lord, have mercy.*  
*Christ, have mercy: Christ, have mercy.*  
*Lord, have mercy: Lord, have mercy.*

## **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into the darkness of our hearts, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

## **WORD**

### **First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13**

*Samuel anointed David even though he was the eighth-oldest son of Jesse and did not match his brothers in height or other physical characteristics. With the anointing came endowment with the Spirit of the LORD, designating David as the LORD's chosen successor to Saul.*

<sup>1</sup>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."

<sup>2</sup>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.'

<sup>3</sup>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." <sup>4</sup>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?" <sup>5</sup>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.

<sup>6</sup>When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is now before the LORD." <sup>7</sup>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." <sup>8</sup>Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." <sup>9</sup>Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." <sup>10</sup>Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." <sup>11</sup>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." <sup>12</sup>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."

<sup>13</sup>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.

## Psalm: Psalm 23

You anoint my head with oil. (*Ps. 23:5*)

<sup>1</sup>The LORD is my shepherd;  
I shall not be in want.

<sup>2</sup>**The LORD makes me lie down in green pastures  
and leads me beside still waters.**

<sup>3</sup>You restore my soul, O LORD,  
and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

<sup>4</sup>**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. R**

<sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

<sup>6</sup>**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. R**

## Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14

*Because we now live in the divine light which is Jesus Christ, we conduct our lives in ways that reflect the light of Christ, so that our activity is truly pleasing to God.*

<sup>8</sup>Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—<sup>9</sup>for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. <sup>10</sup>Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup>Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup>For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; <sup>13</sup>but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, <sup>14</sup>for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”

## Gospel: John 9:1-41

*Jesus heals a man born blind, provoking a hostile reaction that he regards as spiritual blindness to the things of God.*

<sup>1</sup>As [Jesus] 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 neighbors 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."

<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."

<sup>18</sup>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."

<sup>24</sup>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.

<sup>35</sup>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 worshiped him.

<sup>39</sup>Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment 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." God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

## **SERMON REFLECTION From Sundays and Seasons**

Through metaphors of light and sight, today's readings lift up the theme of vision. A man blind from birth is given sight, and the Pharisees' reaction demonstrates their failure to see who Jesus really is. The light of Christ reveals all that is hidden and sinful, as well as "all that is good and right and true" (Eph. 5:9). God cautions Samuel not to evaluate the sons of Jesse according to human standards, lest Samuel overlook David, God's unexpected choice for king of Israel. These texts pose a question: What does it mean to *see* and to *look* as God does?

A note on metaphors of vision and blindness: just as Amy Lindeman Allen reminds preachers about the need for careful attention to language about "light" and "darkness" in a world in which this biblical imagery has been used to justify the sin of white supremacy (see the *From a Scholar* essay for this day), it is also important to be mindful of those who live with blindness or other disabilities. It is not often that people with disabilities find themselves represented positively and powerfully in worship. Though few might claim today that disabilities are a sign of sin, people with disabilities are still regularly pitied, patronized, or simply ignored in the church—if not explicitly, then in worship and community life that often assumes certain kinds of abilities in its design.

Today's message is clear: God does not see or look as people do. Jesus forcibly rejects his disciples' equation of blindness with sin; but Jesus also resists reducing the man's disability, and the man himself, to a tragedy. Instead, Jesus insists that this man has a holy purpose—and this purpose is not only to be healed. The central focus of the action is not the healing itself, but the consequences: an argument over Jesus' identity and the source of his power. The man born blind reveals the truth, cutting through long, windy theological arguments to get at the point. "Though I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25b), he declares. "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (John 9:33). The man born blind can clearly see Jesus' sign for what it means; and this kind of sight has little to do with the human eye.

"The LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7b). What good news could this speak to those who are blind, to those who live with other disabilities, and to all those who struggle in countless ways with how the "outward appearance" of their bodies, their relationships, and their very lives are viewed and judged by their fellow mortals?

Holy baptism includes and encompasses our whole selves—that which is visible, and that which is invisible. Reflecting the light of Christ is not about attaining worldly perfection in outward appearance or ability; it is a call to help reveal God's grace, mercy, justice, and truth in the world. It is not about what we see with the eyes, but how we perceive what is "good and right and true," renouncing the forces of evil—including the racism that equates black or brown bodies with "darkness," and the ableism that considers people with disabilities as less than others. It is holding fast to the promise that the world will one day fully look like the reign of God.

*Meghan Johnston Aelabouni*

## HYMN OF THE DAY

### If You But Trust in God to Guide You

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|--|---|
| 1 If you but trust in God to guide you<br>and place your confidence in him,<br>you'll find him always there beside you,<br>to give you hope and strength within.<br>For those who trust God's changeless love<br>build on the rock that will not move. | 3 In patient trust await his leisure<br>in cheerful hope, with heart content<br>to take whate'er your Father's pleasure<br>and all-discerning love have sent;<br>doubt not your inmost wants are known<br>to him who chose you for his own. |
| 2 What gain is there in futile weeping,<br>in helpless anger and distress?<br>If you are in his care and keeping,<br>in sorrow will he love you less?<br>For he who took for you a cross<br>will bring you safe through ev'ry loss.                    | 4 Sing, pray, and keep his ways unswerving,<br>offer your service faithfully,<br>and trust his word; though undeserving,<br>you'll find his promise true to be.<br>God never will forsake in need<br>the soul that trusts in him indeed.    |

Text: Georg Neumark, 1621-1681; tr. composite, alt.

St. 2 text © 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, admin. Augsburg Fortress

### Apostles' Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.\*  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

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\*Or, "he descended into hell," another translation of this text in widespread use.

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Turning our hearts to God who is gracious and merciful, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

God of insight, open the hearts of the church and the world to all who testify to your deeds of power (*like Jonathan Edwards, whom we commemorate today*). Raise up voices in your church that are often silenced or overlooked due to age, gender expression, race, or economic status. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, empower us to care for the land and all living things that dwell in it and beneath it. Provide rich soil for crops to grow. Bring rain to lands suffering drought. Protect hills and shorelines from damage caused by erosion. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, bring peace to all people and nations. Anoint leaders who seek goodness, righteousness, and truth on behalf of all. Frustrate the efforts of those who would seek to cause violence or terror. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, you care for our needs even before we ask. Come quickly to all who seek prayer this day (*especially*). Accomplish healing through the work of doctors, nurses, physical therapists, nutritionists, and all who tend to human bodies. Be will all of those who suffer around the world from the Coronavirus and help leaders of governments to work toward the common good. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, help this assembly lift up the unique gifts of each person who enters, no matter their physical capacity, cognitive ability, or sensory need. Help us to be creative and brave in making our facilities and our ministries accessible to all. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, you call out to those who are asleep and awaken them to new life with you. We give thanks for your saints (*especially*). Join us together with them as your children in this world and the next. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

According to your steadfast love, O God, hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to you; through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## OFFERING

An offering is gathered for the mission of the church, including the care of those in need.

## **THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

**Amen.**

## **LORD'S PRAYER**

**Our Father in heaven,**

**hallowed be your name,**

**your kingdom come,**

**your will be done,**

**on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins**

**as we forgive those**

**who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial**

**and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,**

**and the glory are yours,**

**now and forever. Amen.**

## **CLOSING HYMN**

### **Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound**

1 Amazing grace! how sweet the  
sound

that saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am  
found;

was blind, but now I see.

2 'Twas grace that taught my heart  
to fear,

and grace my fears relieved;  
how precious did that grace

appear

the hour I first believed!

3 Through many dangers, toils, and  
snares

I have already come;

'tis grace has brought me safe thus

far,

and grace will lead me home.

4 The Lord has promised good to  
me;

his word my hope secures;

he will my shield and portion be  
as long as life endures.

5 When we've been there ten  
thousand years,

bright shining as the sun,

we've no less days to sing God's  
praise

than when we'd first begun.

Text: John Newton, 1725-1807, alt.,  
sts. 1-4; anonymous, st. 5