

South Buxton and Talbot Street Pastoral Charges

Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 19th, 2023

Prelude: by Christie Coatsworth

Welcome & Announcements:

Thank you for your support of all our past services, which are posted on our websites - Southbuxton.ca and Talbotstreet.ca

Lighting of the Christ Candle:

Call to Worship:

Eric: Come into the wild pastures, where sheep graze, and nothing seems amiss. This place feels so very alive.

People: **The trees clap, the birds sing, and the light bounces so that it feels like anything could happen here.**

Eric: We come to worship that promise and possibility.

People: **We come to open our eyes to endless grace.**

Eric: Come let us worship.

Opening Hymn: VU 747 “The Lord’s My Shepherd”

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;
he makes me down to lie
in pastures green; he leadeth me,
the quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again;
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
even for his own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
yet will I fear no ill;
for thou art with me; and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.

My table thou has furnished
in presence of my foes;
my head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me,

and in God's house for evermore
my dwelling-place shall be.**

Prayer of Confession:

People: God, when we have held on to our own ways too long, trusting in what we have come to know so well, and believing in our own comforts, enable us to let go of the familiar, and trust in you.

Allow us to let go of our pride, and trust in your companionship. When our faith seems dry and our souls drier, enable us to let go of the past, and trust in your future. Teach us to sing your grace again.

Reflection Music: “Hold Us in Your Grace”

Words of Affirmation:

Eric: The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

People: Thanks be to God! Amen.

Children’s Story & Lord’s Prayer:

Children’s Hymn: VU 605 “Jesus, Teacher, Brave and Bold”

Jesus, teacher, brave and bold,
let us serve you, young and old.
Let us faith-filled workers be,
all around, your wisdom see.
Let us play and dance and sing,
your goodness find in everything.

Jesus, friend, so strong and true,
show us good, brave work to do.
Show us those who need a friend,
all things broken help us mend.
Free our minds and stretch our care,
teach us to serve you everywhere. **

Scripture: John 9: 1 - 41

Reflection: “New Vision”

God can help us to see the ways we can turn the ordinary elements of life into something amazing. In faith we can shift our perspective to place the Holy Spirit at the centre, and then we will look at the world differently.

Our Psalm today is the 23rd Psalm. When we place God at the centre of our lives we can see how God shepherds our whole lives. In the times of David who is credited to writing the 23rd Psalm, he describes God as the shepherd who leads the

people out in a new exodus, caring for their needs and offering protection. Ordinary fields and pastures are sources of food and places of refuge and shelter. When we read the 23rd Psalm it shifts our vision towards God, and we know that we are not alone. The possibilities can become endless.

Today's Gospel story is where Jesus heals the blind man to see. It is with ordinary elements; mud and spit that a blind man is able to see. When have we experienced ordinary elements of our lives - and see the extraordinariness that comes from God? All through the Gospels we see God's restorative love being expressed in Jesus' life and ministry.

Blindness and other ailments were often viewed as punishment for sin in ancient times. This is the assumptions of Jesus' disciples and of the Pharisees of Jesus' day. This was a common thought for the leaders of Jewish religion; the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Jesus speaks against this thinking saying that this man blindness was not of his sin, nor his parent's sins. Jesus says, "Because of his blindness you will see God work a miracle". Jesus spit on the ground and mixes up some mud and smeared it on the man's eyes. "Go wash off the mud in Siloam Pool". The man did as Jesus asked him to do, and as he washed off the mud, the man could see.

Everyone around the man wondered if he was really the blind man who begged in the streets. "I am that man", he says. "Then how can you see?", they ask. The man tells them, "Jesus made up some mud and smeared it on my eyes. He told me to go wash it off in the Siloam Pool. When I did, I could see". Siloam means, "The one who is sent". What relevance does the name have to do with the blind man?

But the story does not end there. No, Jesus has healed the blind man on the Sabbath. Keeping the Sabbath was very important in practicing Judaism. Its weekly ritual of renewal reflected the God who "rested", on the seventh day of creation. In today's story, Jesus' healing on the Sabbath angers the Pharisees who guard the Jewish laws. The Pharisees say, "This man Jesus doesn't come from God. If he did, he would not break the law of the Sabbath". At issue is what can or cannot be done on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees are going to make a point of Jesus' healing on the Sabbath.

"Kneading" was technically forbidden. Jesus' making of mud could be viewed as "kneading". The larger question involves Sabbath and healing. Has Jesus broken or kept the law by performing this act?

You may remember the 2003 movie "Bruce Almighty". Jim Carrey plays Bruce Nolan, a down-on-his-luck television reporter who complains to God (played of

course by Morgan Freeman), that God is not doing his job correctly and Bruce is offered the chance to try being God himself for one week. God tells Bruce that he cannot tell others he has God's powers, nor can he use the powers to alter free will. Bruce is initially jubilant with the powers, using them for personal gains, such as getting his job back, exacting revenge on a street gang that bullied him earlier, and impressing his girlfriend.

Bruce finds ways of using his powers around Buffalo to cause miraculous events to occur at otherwise mundane events that he covers as the reporter. Bruce continues to hear voices in his head and re-encounters God, who explains the voices are prayers that Bruce must deal with. Bruce creates a computerized email-like system to receive the prayers and respond. Immediately Bruce finds that the influx is far too many for him to handle and sets the program to answer every prayer “Yes” automatically.

Chaos ensues. As Bruce looks around, he realizes that Buffalo has fallen into chaos due to his actions. Bruce returns to God, who explains that he cannot solve all the problems and Bruce must figure out a way himself. Bruce then starts to help others without using his God powers. He returns to his computer at home and goes about answering prayers earnestly. Eventually God takes back over – Thank God.

What happened in Bruce Almighty is similar to what happened in Jerusalem after Jesus healed the Blind man. The healing creates division within the community. Neighbours divide over whether this is the same man they had known. Pharisees divide over whether Jesus is from God or not. The man’s parents distance themselves from their son for fear of the religious leaders. The threat of expulsion from the synagogue would be like expelling yourself from your community.

The transformation of the blind man is not just from blindness to sight. Initially, the blind man is a passive recipient of Jesus’ actions, but he becomes more active as the story goes on. By reporting what has happened, he becomes a teacher of theology to the teachers of theology. Eventually, this healed one becomes a disciple of Jesus - the one who healed.

With some mud and some spit, Jesus changed the life of a blind beggar. These ordinary elements were used to change not only the life of one person but also a community as the news of the miracle spread. When we see these healings as gifts from God, our perspective can change. When we see those we think we can ignore or they are not important to us, and then see the way God sees them – as individuals who are valued and have worth – our entire world view can change as well.

Encounters with God move us beyond what we have previously thought. Jesus healing the one born blind did that for the religious authorities.

We might think that “Life in Christ” is dazzling and brilliant. At times it is, at other times we must look at the world differently. We are called to trust God to help discern what is right, even though we do not see it. Today’s story of mud and spit and a swimming pool may seem fairly commonplace as we wipe our children’s faces or dive into the deep end. Yet for God, we see extraordinary healing and a excluded blind man once again being part of the community.

In today’s story we see the chaos the healing causes in the community as they ask lots of questions. We are encouraged to look at this story through the eyes of God. What may we have not noticed before?

With grace Jesus heals the blind man, but so much more happens. In the 23rd Psalm, we see that God’s grace is with us. We are not alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Hymn: VU 371 “Open My Eyes, That I...”

Open my eyes, that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me;
place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.
 Silently now I wait for thee,
 ready, my God, thy will to see.
 Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my ears, that I may hear
voices of truth thou sendest clear;
and while the wavenotes fall on my ear,
everything false will disappear.
 Silently now I wait for thee,
 ready, my God, thy will to see.
 Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my mouth, and let me bear
gladly the warm truth everywhere;
open my heart and let me prepare
love with thy children thus to share.
 Silently now I wait for thee,
 ready, my God, thy will to see.
 Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine! **

Invitation to Share Our Gifts:

Eric: As we offer our gifts to God, we also bring with us our faltering steps, our brokenness, our hopes, our risking and our hearts, that as God transforms our gifts, God will also transform us to be God's blessed people. We give as an act of gratitude and worship.

Offertory: VU 541 "Praise God From Whom..."

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Offertory Prayer:

People: Loving God, giver of all things, as people alive to your goodness, we offer these gifts and our talents to the service of all, within our neighbourhood and beyond. This we pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Prayer Hymn: MV 66 "Senzeni Na?" *(What Have We Done?)*

Senzeni Na? Senzeni Na?
Senzeni Na? Senzeni Na?
Senzeni Na? Senzeni Na?
Senzeni Na? Senzeni Na?

Pastoral Prayer:

Closing Hymn: VU 626 "I Heard the Voice of Jesus"

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 'Come unto me and rest;
lay down, O weary one, lay down
 your head upon my breast.'
I came to Jesus as I was,
 weary and worn and sad;
I found in him a resting place,
 and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 'Behold, I freely give
the living water; thirsty one,
 stoop down, and drink, and live.'
I came to Jesus, and I drank
 of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
 and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 'I am this dark world's light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise,
 and all your day be bright.'
I looked to Jesus, and I found
 in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk
 till travelling days are done. **

Benediction:

Eric: Go out into the world. Share peace and joy to all you meet, now and forever more!

Sending Out Hymn: MV 71 "When the Wind of Winter..."

When the wind of winter blows
bringing times of solitude,
fill the silent icy night,
be our hearts' compassion.
*Holy Light, warm our night;
warm the time of winter,
Holy Light, warm our night;
warm the time of winter.*

Amen, Amen, Amen.

Postlude: – Christie Coatsworth

Prayers: - Please include these people in your prayers this week.

We have offered prayer for these people each Sunday morning just before the Zoom Service.
It was suggested to share these names with the total group – as "In the Spirit We Are One".

Cancer:

**Chris
Paul
Carol
Maureen
Susan
Cara
Margie
Marcus
Susan
Ingrid
Jerry**

**Reg and Mary Jane
Dave
Bill
Jane**

**Donna
Martin and Family
Larry
Kerigan
Fran
Ken
Natalie
Ruth
Dave
Marj
Sue
Evelyn**

**Richard and Evelyn
Elaine
Wayne**

**Ed Sykes
Arley Smith
Eric
Ron**

Wes