

Lent Four – week one of a new kind of worship:

A man born blind

John 9:1-12

A Man Born Blind Receives Sight

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

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Curious that the disciples first question is about blame: “Whose fault is it, Jesus, that this man was born blind?”

Blame can be a very satisfying thing. To point a finger and KNOW a cause often feels like resolution. It allows those who have been suffering to say things like “Damn Cancer!” or “Bloody government!” or “It’s all YOUR fault...!” We are well accustomed to this kind of behaviour; likely we’re all guilty of it.

Of course, it helps if you are blaming something that can’t speak for itself – a disease, a national disaster, or an institution. Then you don’t need to get your facts straight, or shape your concerns in respectful language...and of course, that is a habit that soon bleeds into our interpersonal relationships.

Right now, people are looking for somewhere to send their blame. Those who travel; those in government; the healthcare system; it seems that anyone is a potential target. The restrictions are too tight; they came too late; they are unenforceable; they are not mindful of the poor or the homeless or the folks who are at greatest risk. Our selfish impulse to lay blame without acknowledging our responsibilities to one another threatens to undo us.

Jesus cuts across the impulse to lay blame. “Neither sinned...”: An elegant and necessary deflection, Jesus ; thanks for keeping us focussed – because with his next words he directs our attention to the work of God in the world; work that is eternal, unceasing , and utterly untroubled by our infirmities.

Then Jesus gets to work. Spit makes mud; mud makes a mess; “Go and wash!” - and so is the eternal made plain.

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The man who is healed will famously say to those who want to blame Jesus for breaking the law (it happens that this healing was done on the Sabbath) “One thing I do know; that though I was blind, now I see.” When the work of God is brought out into the open, blame becomes unnecessary – gratitude is inevitable.

We have been here before – though not in living memory. Just over one hundred years ago, the Spanish Flu ravaged communities and nations – spreading death and fear with alarming speed and ruthless efficiency. Today we have endless, real-time updates that keep us off balance and unsettled. And still there is Jesus, who would remind us to save the blame and look for evidence of God’s grace. If spit made with mud can open the eyes of the blind, imagine what compassion shaped by the love of neighbour might accomplish.

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A prayer for the week:

Glorious God

Our lives are being changed by things beyond our control. Yet this is not new.

Our habits are being altered in ways we could not have anticipated. And this is not new.

These problems – the ruthless and indiscriminate progress of this new virus – are challenging and frightening. And we know what to do when we are frightened.

We turn to the light – to the One who promises to walk with us; ‘even in the valley of the shadow of death.’

Your promises are ancient and comforting. Your presence is constant and assuring. Your Son offers an eternal perspective on our present and pressing anxieties. And none of this is new. It is News – Good News – and we praise you for the comfort that comes from sharing these stories and living this faith into reality.

Bind us together by your present, purposeful Spirit that we may not fear, but give constant, jubilant thanks.

We pray all this together in Jesus’ name

Amen

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Be assured of the Peace that God has promised, which is yours now and always through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen