

LENT 4, A – March 22, 2020  
SCRIPTURES – Isaiah 42:14-21; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41; Psalm 27

*As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed 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.”*

The Scripture readings for today speak of great works of God. In Isaiah 42, God gives a promise to people the people of Israel. Although the nation would be destroyed and the people enslaved in Babylon for many years – punishment for their sinful forsaking of Him and turning to other gods – God would come in power and rescue them. **“For a long time I have held my peace; I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out,”** God says. **“I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know... I will turn the darkness before them into light.”** In the Gospel reading we hear of this literally happening, as Jesus gives sight to a man who had been born blind. God is great indeed, and can do wondrous things! So: why not now? Why, O Lord? Do you not see the suffering this virus is causing? Why do You seem so distant and so slow to help? To such questions, we have the answer Jesus gave as the reason the man was born blind: **“that the works of God might be displayed.”**

What works can God be doing by this virus? Well, He is certainly humbling us. Covid-19 is a very tiny virus. But, it is bringing to its knees our mighty economy... our invincible military, which is also hunkering down before it... our vaunted medical system, which is scrambling to fight it and help those sickened by it. Our proud American independence has also been set aside, as the government has ordered many businesses to close and people to not assemble together. Our arrogant trust in ourselves, in our wisdom and our abilities, is being shaken! We need to remember our weakness and lowliness and lift up our eyes to our powerful – and merciful – God.

And, as we do, we need to repent of our sins. Now, don't get me wrong; I am not saying that our sins have caused this. But, sufferings can bring forth sins; we see this in our Gospel reading. **“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”** Jesus' disciples ask as they come upon a blind man. So: are there sins we need to confess and repent of right now?

Well, it is a sin to be blaming others for the Coronavirus; and many have been doing this. I have heard China being blamed... the U.S. military... President Trump... liberal Mayors of large cities... and, various individuals for their selfish behaviors. Now, there have been failures. It's easy to find them, especially in large organizations like governments, and cast blame. But, failures are not necessarily sins; and even many sins are more weaknesses than intentional evils. Notice: when Jesus is asked, **“Who sinned, this man or his parents?”** He responds, **“Neither.”** What is sinful is the quick

and easy casting of blame, and we all easily fall into this. We need to repent of this, even if we are not doing so in this Corona crisis!

It is also sinful to think that you know what God's will is in a crisis. Now, God is at work. He is always at work in our world and in the lives of His people. ***"I am the light of the world,"*** Jesus says, and as surely as the sun shines every day and by its heat and light brings about countless blessings – most of which we are unaware – so our Lord is daily and constantly shining upon us and doing His good work. But, that work is often hidden... even behind works that bring darkness, such as sickness. God may appear to be turned away, and His face dark with a frown... and yet, He can be working to bring about great good! His Word assures us of this, and Christ's death is the greatest example and assurance of this. How dark did God's face seem on the day that Jesus died! And yet, how brightly was God's mercy and love shining. 1 John 4:10 says, ***"This is love, that God loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation"*** – the sacrificial payment – ***"for our sins."***

And that is the good news that we must never lose sight of, especially at times like this. No matter what may be happening in our world, or in our lives, Jesus died for our sins and rose again for our justification, our forgiveness. Our sins – every one of them, no matter how evil, or hidden and secret – were born by Jesus and taken away from us. His death for them is our forgiveness! And so, our ultimate healing, the bodily resurrection from the dead to eternal life in heaven, is assured!! Nothing – no disease; no sin; no foolish casting of blame and shame – can change this.

Now, sure, the "delivery" of Christ's salvation to us is being affected right now; and that is difficult. Delivery of help is critical. We are rightly concerned with the delivery of Covid-19 tests; with protective masks; and with respirators for the sick. Well, Christ's salvation – the forgiveness and eternal life which He gained for us by His life, death, resurrection and ascension – also needs to be brought to us and received by us. And that is difficult right now. Our churches are closed. We cannot receive Christ in His body and blood; we cannot be together to encourage one another. Even so, we are so blessed today! We all have Bibles. You can read and hear God's assurance of forgiveness yourself! You can listen to Services and Bible studies over the internet and the telephone. You can share Scriptures and prayers by email and text. As the mud Jesus put on the blind man's eyes carried His healing to him, so God's healing is coming to us through our technology. Christ is still among us and blessing us!

And, He is working through us. For, it is human wisdom and skill given by God – He created us and our brains – which created the computer, the smart phone, and the internet. God has enabled us to understand viruses, and how disease affects our bodies, so that we can come up with effective treatments and vaccines. In this we perhaps see another reason – and certainly another result – behind this present crisis. God is bringing us together and giving us the opportunity to shine in this dark world.

There is plenty of darkness around right now. Many people are afraid. Some are hoarding groceries and supplies. And, there are those who are living foolishly, not

caring that their actions may bring harm to others. Unusual times like this can be especially frightening for those who do not have hope – especially the hope we have in Christ.

And so, God uses such times to break down barriers and bring people together. Friends and neighbors reach out to each other more. People become willing to help those they don't even know. Shoot, even the Democrats and Republicans are beginning to work together and speak better of one another! (Maybe the apocalypse is upon us!)

***“At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord,”*** St. Paul says to the Ephesian Christians. We have a special light – God's light in Christ – to shine in our darkness. Even the seeming lowliest of believers has much to share. The man who had been born blind, for instance, who was nothing more than a beggar: at first he didn't even know who Jesus was. He only knew that a man named Jesus had healed him. But, as he was questioned and forced to think more about Him, the light began to dawn. He progressed from seeing Jesus as a prophet; to a worshiper of God who was doing God's will; to a man come from God. No longer a blind beggar, he became a disciple who even taught about Jesus. When Jesus came to him and revealed Himself to be the Son of Man, the promised Savior of Israel, he believed and worshiped Him... as do we. He is one with us! We are one with him... and with Jesus.

Even though now you can only listen to and worship your Savior at home, know that He is with you in this crisis, as He is in every situation, whether bad and good. The works of God are being displayed. God is working His will for good. *Believe this*. Shine this faith in the darkness by your patient and confident living and serving of others, as God gives you opportunity to do. And the peace of God will keep you – your heart, mind, and body – in Christ Jesus, our Lord! Amen.