



WEEKLY STUDY March 19 – March 25, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

Our sermon series for Lent is: "Made For a Miracle"

On Ash Wednesday we began our new sermon series: Made for a miracle. As we journey to the cross with Jesus this Lent, we will be examining the miracles in the book of John. Each one offers us an invitation to conversion: from emptiness to overflow; from holding on to letting go; from fear to courage; from spiritual blindness to depth of sight; from death to life. We are encouraged to make the season of Lent a meaningful one through practices that enrich our spiritual life and increase our missional outreach to family, church, and community.

Our scripture this week is John 9:1-7 (NRSV)

"As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, '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.' 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, saying to him, 'Go wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see."

- 1)** Our scripture this week recounts the miracle (called sign in the Gospel of John) of Jesus healing the man born blind. While both Mark and Matthew include healing men who were blind, John's story is unique in its telling. Read Mark 8:22-26 (with one of my favorite lines: "I can see people, but they look like trees walking). The healing here involved spit, but no mud. Also read Matthew 9:27-31. Here Jesus merely touches the eyes of the blind men – no mud nor spit. Pastor Sam reminded us that the miracles or signs in John: 1) Reveal who Jesus is; 2) Point to the character of the Kingdom; and 3) Create faith.

Question: Consider all three accounts of healing the blind and the three points Pastor Sam made about what miracles can do. Do the differing accounts offer up different insights for you? Which one speaks most to you? Why?

- 2) Pastor Sam also emphasized the importance of the “corrective” issued by Jesus to the crowd. The first question to Jesus is, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus says no one sinned. Blindness doesn’t rest with the behavior of individuals or their parents. This made me consider whether today we still may look at those with disabilities or illnesses and think (maybe not say it out loud): “Who sinned?” Jesus, as an observant Jew, in this moment is also reminding the people that the Torah emphasizes the importance of treating all people with respect. Leviticus 19:14 states: “You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind” and Deuteronomy 27:18 says, “Cursed be anyone who misleads a blind person on the road.” Jesus gives respect to each person seeking his healing, treating them as a whole person – not less of a person because of their illness or disability.

Question: In what ways do we perhaps think of a person’s disability associating it perhaps with shame, or being a burden, or being less of a person. How do we accommodate disabilities in order to enable a person to be fully included in church, and in our community?

- 3) Pastor Sam reminded us that we would always do well to read what comes before a particular story – and what comes afterward – to receive the whole message. It’s a great warning about cherry-picking individual verses that can be taken out of context. I reading the verses that follow Sunday’s reading, she says we find that this story is a tale of two conversions: the Pharisees from physical sight to spiritual blindness in their failure to see Jesus for who he is and the kingdom. For the blind man – from physical blindness to physical and spiritual sight: “I once was blind, but now I see.” She told us, “Kingdom people live with a different set of senses.” She gave us great examples from the miracles:

“Kingdom people see the work of God in the midst of darkness.

Some see wilderness but we see a way through

Some see wasteland but we see the streams God provides

Some see emptiness but we see overflow

Some see scarcity but we see abundance

Some see chaos swirling over the waters but we see Jesus saying keep your eyes on me.”

Question: Consider some of the happenings in today’s world. In what do you see darkness, wilderness, wasteland, emptiness, scarcity, chaos? What helps you see God in the midst of darkness? God providing a way through? God providing streams of life? God providing overflow? God providing abundance? God providing calm?

- 4) Our worship table this week included items that help us increase our ability to see – or to shift the way we see. It included a magnifying glass, microscope, binoculars, kaleidoscope, telescope. Each one helps us see details, see further than we can, see closer than we can, see shifting patterns and new images. Our physical eyes sometimes need help. As someone who’s had glasses (or contact lens) since grade school, I remember putting on the glasses and saying, “Wow. Look at the detail of the leaves on the trees!” I also remember – after cataract surgery – realizing once again the intensity

of color. (I honestly thought my blue car had faded to gray until after surgery, I realized it was still blue!) This is a great reminder that relying on our own eyes to see – to understand – may not be the best. (Think of the old adage, “I can worship God just as well by myself on the golf course.” Instead we realize, while yes we can worship God by ourselves, worshipping in community helps us ‘see’ things we wouldn’t have alone.)

Question: Who, what, where do you find aids that help you more clearly see God’s message, care, and love?

Prayer: (Our prayer this week is the Affirmation of Faith from Sunday’s service.)

“O God of mud and saliva, O God of dust and breath, heal us with your presence and with your touch. Open us up to perceive where you are at work in the world that we may join with you. We want to see where you are and be with you there. Illuminate the way, O God, we are ready for you. AMEN”

Weekly Challenge: This Sunday was the fourth Sunday in Lent. (Remember – every Sunday is a feast day because that was the day Jesus was resurrected.) Lent is the time to deepen our faith; to spend time listening for God’s guidance; to give witness in our actions and practices to our faith. Start each day this week by praying, “God – open my eyes to see your Kingdom at work in the world. Help me be the aid to help others see your love.”

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)