

New Hope Lutheran Church

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March 19, 2023

The 4th Sunday in Lent

Coming Events

- | | | |
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| Mar 21 | 2:00 | Kammari Impola |
| Mar 22 | 10 – 1 | Kahvi Time Regent St. |
| | 5:30 | Souper-Time Regent St. |
| | 6:30 | English Lenten service Regent St.
upstairs |
| | 6:30 | Finnish Lenten service Regent St.
downstairs |
| Mar 23 | 6:30 | Finnish Bible Study Zoom |
| Mar 26 | 10:00 | Finnish Worship Service Voima Hall |
| | 11:30 | English Worship Service Regent St. |

In our prayers Eero, Ron, Marilyn.

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.**

First Reading “**1 Samuel 16:1 – 13**”

¹ 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.” ²Samuel 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.’ ³Invite 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.” ⁴Samuel 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?” ⁵He 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.

⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.” ⁷But 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.” ⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” ⁹Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” ¹⁰Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” ¹¹Samuel 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.” ¹²He 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.” ¹³Then 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.

Second Reading “**Ephesians 5:8 – 14**”

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

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel “**John 9:1 – 41**”

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹ As [Jesus] 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 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?” 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."

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then 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." ¹⁶Some 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. ¹⁷So 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."

¹⁸The 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 ¹⁹and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but 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." ²²His 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. ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴So 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." ²⁵He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He 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?" ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus 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." ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

The Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

By Rev. Charles Nolting
"What Blinds Us?"

Our lengthy gospel lesson got me wondering what it would be like to be physically blind. The best I can do is to relate a story from my past.

It happened when the father of a friend of mine went blind from degenerative eye disease. The family tried to convince old Stuart to get a seeing eye dog, and were quite surprised when he agreed to leave home for several weeks to take the training course required. During the training he was told several times; "*this animal is not a pet, it is a working dog, so do not make a pet out of it! If you take your blindness seriously, be serious with the dog and you will be well served.*" After training, Stuart came back home with the dog and what did he do? He made a pet out of it.

The mistake wasn't fatal for him, but it did lead him on several merry adventures. In one instance Stuart was walking along main street and he wondered why he could hear so many people slowing their cars down, some of them saying; "Hi Stuart" "How are you Stuart?" (Everyone in the village knew Stuart). It wasn't until later that someone informed him that his supposed guide dog had been leading him right down the center line of the main street!

On another day Stuart informed his wife that he and the dog were going to the Post Office to get the mail. Several hours went by, and his wife began to worry about what had become of Stuart and the dog. So, she took out the car and began frantically driving around the village in search of them. He was blind, after all. Finally, after a very long and hectic search, she discovered them on a side street nowhere near the Post office. As she drove up beside them she rolled down the window and shouted at him; "*You've been gone for hours! Where have you been?*" And Stuart shouted back; "*how the heck should I know? The dog's been leading me!*"

You could say that Stuart allowed his affection to blind him from what the dog should have been. Breaking the rules was another way of being blind. Have you ever thought about how many ways we can be blind? How often have there been things we should have seen,

should have noticed in life, but paid no attention; and it may have cost us in some way. Blindness isn't always a physical disability.

And this is also shown in our gospel lesson today. Jesus heals a man blind from birth and, when the man is taken to the Pharisees to confirm the miracle, the Pharisees refuse to see what is right in front of them, and instead concentrate on what they see as an infraction of their laws; working on the Sabbath day. Rather than delight in the miracle right before their eyes, they want to disavow the miracle (by calling the parents forward to confirm or deny the man had ever been blind), and instead made an issue over Jesus performing such an act on the holy day.

And, of all people in Jerusalem, the Pharisees – who studied the scriptures very diligently – they would be the ones expected to see the world with open eyes. They would have pored over Old Testament miracle stories truly believing that God had been present in them. So, we might wonder what held them back from seeing something just as miraculous in their own time, and in their own back yards.

The problem was that the Pharisees were a powerful group in those days. They held power over who was allowed to take part in temple activities; meaning that they could choose who was allowed to approach the holy place and who couldn't. Now it our day it may not seem like such a big deal, but in those times if you were shunned from the temple, few people would have anything to do with you for fear of being associated with you and also being shunned. That meant your livelihood would be affected, your family would be affected, and your social life could easily go downhill. It was for that reason that the man's parents foisted off their son to the Pharisees and attempted to weasel their way out of answering questions.

So because the Pharisees enjoyed such power, they were more concerned with using that power than

seeing the glory of God displayed right before them. Rather than seeing Jesus for who he really was, they wanted to shuttle him off to the side and discredit him. While they, of all people, should have known better, their desire to keep their hold of their power actually blinded them, and held their faith back.

Sometimes you see a similar dynamic in a workplace. An employee has an idea that could save the company some money, but the boss doesn't like it, mostly because it wasn't the boss's idea. The boss may feel threatened by the employee who comes up with good ideas. And so, they crush the ideas and just keep things the way they are rather than move forward. They are blinded by their position in life.

Now I'm sure that we may feel we are never blind about anything. But consider how, when driving an automobile, there is something referred to as a "Blind Spot", which happens when a car is beside you, but in just the right position that you don't see them either in your mirror or your peripheral vision. It's easy to check with a quick yank of your head, but do we?

Is it possible that we are blinded more than we may think in our own lives? How often do we concentrate on the way things used to be, and the way we would like things to be, (certain that that's how things should be), but can't see what is actually going on around us? Do we ever concentrate so much on bringing back "the good old days" that we neglect to see the possibility of a bright new future for ourselves?

Decades ago I'm told that church buildings were full and all was well in the church, but back then we were very much blinded to the possibility of working with others ecumenically. We belonged to one denomination and had little to do with "those other people" of other denominations. Today we are discovering the blessings of working together.

We can also be blinded if we have put so much effort into our own lives that we neglect to see the need of others. It is very easy to be blinded when we attempt to put all our efforts into improving our own lives to the point that we cannot see the poverty of others around us. There are many ways of being blind in this world.

So how do we avoid such blindness? Listening to others is one way. Opening our lives to see the world as others less fortunate see the world helps us to gain understanding of other points of view and where they are coming from, as well as helping us to view our own ministry in new and vibrant ways. Concentrating less on ourselves leaves us open to seeing the world as God sees the world. Discovering where we are blind can not only help us to see new possibilities, but to also help shine God's light on the world.

God wants us to have sight and give sight to others. This is our mission. This is why we are here. We have the ability to cure the blindness that is the darkness of the world and so, in a world that is so often blind, let us then be a light shining in the darkness in order to bring understanding, compassion, and God's love into the world. Amen.

Prayers

Sustained by God's abundant mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of creation.

Eternal God, you seal us by the Holy Spirit and mark us with the cross of Christ forever in baptism. Inspire us by your love as together we strive for justice and peace in all the earth. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Creating God, by your word you have made all things, and you hate nothing you have made. Teach us to perceive the beauty of the breadth of your creation, from the grandest mountain range to the smallest springtime bud. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Powerful God, you anoint kings and establish rulers.
Guide the work of heads of state and elected officials.
Encourage them to lead with justice and to remove
barriers that impede the well-being of all. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Shepherding God, you lead us beside still waters and
restore our souls. Keep watch over those who weep;
tend all who are sick and comfort those who grieve.
Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

God our host, you fill us at your table with more than we
could ever ask. Feed us with hunger for justice. Equip
the feeding ministries of this congregation and
community. Nourish us so we can nourish our
neighbors. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

God of history, with thanksgiving we remember our
ancestors in faith who cared for your people. We praise
you for the ways they formed the faith of others and
continue to inspire us. Merciful God, **receive our
prayer.**

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your
steadfast love and your promise to renew your whole
creation; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

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.**