

4 Lent A 2020

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

Today, let's wonder together –  
And yes, we are together  
Even though we are scattered in many places –  
We are together in this moment  
When the Holy Spirit gathers and connects us,  
In ways we would never have chosen on our own.  
We did not choose this moment,  
But we can, I believe,  
Learn to embrace it.

The people of God have always  
Learned to embrace  
The journey they do not choose.  
That's the way to life.

Faced with the unexpected,  
The terrible,  
The frightening and bewildering,  
There are two way to go:  
The refusal to budge,  
The refusal to listen,  
The refusal to accept the new,  
Which leads to a dead end.  
Or –  
The willingness to face the real,  
The willingness let go what is gone,  
And the willingness to change.

That's the journey of the people of God.  
We can choose,  
In this moment,  
To act as the people of God have always acted,  
And set out along the way.

We are on a journey  
Through the unknown.  
It is frightening,  
Bewildering,  
And ever-changing.

Though it seems that everything is uncertain,  
There is one thing we can know.  
The people of God  
Are no strangers to the journey.  
And though we make mistakes,  
Get lost,  
And quarrel on the way,  
We can take hope in one thing:  
God is always with us on the journey,  
And our encounter with God on the journey  
Has always led us to new life.

We can trust the stories of the journey.

The journey from a closed system,  
To opening questions,  
And a new way of looking at the world.

The journey from shaming and isolation  
To revelation,  
And a sense of meaning and purpose.

The journey from blindness to sight,  
From darkness to light.

The journey from anger and despair to hope,  
From bondage to freedom,  
From death to life.

Since the early days of the church,  
Through times of anxiety,  
Turmoil,  
Pestilence, plague, and famine,  
The church has turned to sacred story  
As an invitation.  
An invitation to new life,  
To reconciliation with ourselves,  
With others, and with God.  
An invitation to engage  
The suffering of the world  
In concrete material ways,  
And an invitation to open our hearts and minds  
To the holy one  
Already waiting within us.

Stories like the one we hear today –  
the story of the man born blind,  
Whose healing reveals God's will and works.

This story offers  
An invitation to contemplate,  
And enter into,  
The transformative encounter with the living Christ  
To which each of us is called.

So – what can the story of the man born blind  
Show us,  
How can it invite us today?

I would not have chosen it for this day,  
But I believe in looking for the gift  
In what we would not choose.

How can the story invite us,  
If we go to the heart of the story,  
As the man born blind invites us to do?

If these were those ordinary times  
To which we always look back –  
Ordinary times like, say, a month ago –  
Then we could linger longer  
Over the extraneous details of the story.  
Forget about mud,  
Forget about the parents,  
Forget, even about the Pharisees.  
Forget, even, about the question,  
Who sinned, that this happened.  
None of that matters today.

Yes, the way the story is told,  
It offers a false and misleading picture  
Of our brothers and sisters,  
Our siblings in faith, the Jews.  
Let's name that,  
And, for today, set it aside.

Yes, the story suggests a theology  
That is misleading and unhelpful,  
The false notion that God might ever,  
For any reason,

Cause harm or limitation to anything in all creation.  
Again, let's name that,  
And, for today, set it aside.

The heart of the story,  
As the man who receives his sight proclaims,  
Is this,  
One thing I do know.  
Though I was blind,  
Now I see.

The nattering,  
Avoidance,  
Blaming of the crowd around the edges of the story  
Cannot hide the central truth:  
We can be transformed,  
Healed,  
Renewed and empowered  
When we meet Jesus face to face.

Much of the time,  
We stumble around in the dark.  
We can't help it,  
It's what it means to be human.

But we're not stuck in our blindness.  
Through the infinite mystery of grace,  
We can see through our blindness  
And catch a glimpse  
Of the glory and power of God.  
And when we do,  
We can bear witness.

Like the man born blind,  
We can't know everything;  
We can't know how the healing works,  
Or even, completely,  
Who the healer is.  
But we can claim, affirm,  
Trust and share the good news,  
That the holy and mysterious source of love  
Wills our good,  
Our healing,  
Our embrace of a life  
Where we can see.

Even when we think we cannot.  
None of us can see where we are going  
Today, or tomorrow,  
Or next month.  
But we can see the one who stands before us,  
Laying a healing hand on us  
And transforming our experience of the world.

This is what it means to be the church in these times.  
The church is not the only way,  
But it is the way for us.

Yes, there are other true ways of faith,  
Many people who call upon the name of God  
By different names,  
Many who live faithfully in the world  
By trusting in the goodness deep within all life.  
They are fellow travelers on the road.

But we are the church,  
And we are together in this,  
Together in different places,  
Together in new ways.

We are the church,  
A laboratory where we try different experiments,  
Looking for a way forward.  
Some of them fail.  
Some of them bring new knowledge.  
And sometimes through our intelligence,  
Sometimes despite or even because of our mistakes,  
Something yields discovery and offers hope.  
So let's let ourselves be a laboratory.  
Let's see.

We are the church.  
We have been called a museum,  
And some have rejected that.  
But others have embraced it.  
We are a museum  
Offering vibrant engagement now  
With the treasures of the past.  
So let's let ourselves be a museum.  
Let's see.

We are a home,

A sanctuary,  
The mother to a thousand generations.

Even in these times,  
We can still be the church,  
And we can still welcome all who come.

Let's welcome each other,  
As we come together in many places,  
Gathered and sustained  
By the Holy Spirit,  
To whom no doors are closed.

It doesn't matter if you have been a dutiful attender,  
Or vociferously absent.  
It doesn't matter if you have been a constant leader  
Or entered from time to time to rest and pray.  
You are here now,  
Bringing your hopes,  
Your longings,  
Your intentions,  
To join with us in enlivening this non-proximate space.  
The strength and hope we gather here  
Can be our gift to the world.

We are still the church  
Doing everything in our power,  
In our several callings,  
To address this crisis.

Our individual circumstances are different,  
Yet we face one great challenge.  
The daily changes in our lives are different,  
But we are united in a common calling.  
Together with people around the globe,  
We are called to engage our own best practices,  
And to foster and support them in others.  
We know what to do,  
Even in the face of the unknown.  
It takes courage and conviction to do what is right,  
And we have the capacity to do what is right.  
That's a call to every member of the human family.

And we, the church,  
Have another call.  
We are the people who maintain the virtue of hope.

We are the people whose eyes can be opened  
To see the kingdom of God,  
The commonwealth of love and justice,  
Hidden and active even in this time of crisis.

We are the church, here and now,  
Here for each other,  
Here for the world.

Here with our doors closed,  
But our hands and hearts open.  
There is work to do.  
As there is always work to do.  
We are beginning to see  
What is needed in this time.

We do not know where the way will lead,  
But God will be with us  
And open our eyes to see the journey  
As it unfolds.

We do this for ourselves,  
And on behalf of the whole world.

Have our eyes been opened  
To see and trust  
And act on the power of God?

Let's see.

*Delivered in St. Andrew's, Denver, on March 22, 2020  
In the presence of a congregation gathered remotely  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.*