

22 March 2020
Lent 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Gift of Sight to See the Gift of God”

Text: John 9:1-41

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, I was not supposed to be here today. I was supposed to be down in Kentucky attending Vicar Neely Owen’s last service as Vicar Owen, and then attending his ordination in the Office of the Holy Ministry, becoming Pastor Owen. But here I am. God’s ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts (Isaiah 55). What we want we do not always get, and sometimes we get what we do not want.

How true that is especially these days. These days when we’re getting an awful lot of what we do not want. These days when things keep changing so rapidly, seemingly going from bad to worse. But of this we can be sure: our God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is faithful to every promise and steadfast in His love. For Him it is never bad to worse, but always good. And He has set an end to this. But just as we do not know the day when our Lord is coming again in glory and this world as we know it will end, so too we do not know when this will end. But He does. So until then, we wait and we trust. For our Father in heaven is always doing what is best for us.

It didn’t have to be, though. This pandemic. And I *don’t* mean that China should have told the world sooner and so it could have been stopped. I mean that there was no sickness, no disease, no pandemics, and no death in God’s creation as God’s created it. Only life. We did this. Sin did this. We are reaping the wages of the sin which we brought into the world. So next time you think your sin is a little thing that really doesn’t matter, remember these days. It’s probably what Adam and Eve thought, too. *It’s just a piece of fruit . . .*

So - in a sense - the disciples were right when they asked Jesus about a man blind from birth. When they asked, ***Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*** They were right that sin had taken away this man’s ability to see. That sin had robbed him of this good gift of God. But they were not right in trying to pinpoint a particular sin or a particular sinner. Just like sin brought this pandemic upon us, but those who get this disease, it’s not because of a particular sin they’ve done or because they’re worse sinners than others. *If that were the case, then I would have this virus.* Rather, Jesus says, you’re going to see ***the works of God displayed in him.*** Rather than trying to figure out whose responsible, open your eyes, because you’re going to see God do

something great - undo the sin that caused this blindness and give sight to this man who had never seen anything before in his entire life.

And Jesus does. But He doesn't just decree this man's sight by the power of His Word. He could have. He had healed people before like that. And He doesn't touch the man to heal him. He could have done it that way, too, like He had also done before. But instead, Jesus makes mud and puts it on the man's eyes and has him go wash in a pool of water. It is a reminder to us of our baptism, when this happened to us. Where through the washing of water Jesus grants us the healing forgiveness of our sins and the faith to see Him as our Saviour.

Well, this becomes the talk of the town! Everyone is talking about it . . . kind of like today, where's its hard to have a conversation without talking about the pandemic. But when the Pharisees get word of what has happened, and that it happened *on a Sabbath Day*, well this is unacceptable to them. According to their laws (not the Law of Moses mind you, but their laws), Jesus should not have made that mud that He put on that man's eyes, and that man should not have gone and washed. Both of those things qualified as work for the Pharisees, and so were sinful in their eyes.

But the truth is, *they had eyes but could not see*. They were blind to the wonderful work Jesus had done in restoring the sight of a man born blind.

And they were blind to the very reason for the Sabbath Day. For the Sabbath Day was set aside by God as a day for man to stop work so that God could work for us. To receive the gifts of God is exactly what the Sabbath Day was all about! So in reality, there was no more appropriate day for this man to receive His sight than the Sabbath Day. The Pharisees, however, won't have it, and cast this man out. He is no longer welcome in the synagogue.

So Jesus, friend of outcasts, finds him. And in addition to giving him the gift of physical sight, now gives him the gift of spiritual sight. He sees Jesus now not just as a prophet, but the Son of Man, the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world, *His* Saviour. **The gift of sight to see the gift of God.** And this second gift is greater than the first.

For this is the greatest gift any of us can receive - the faith to see Jesus not just as the Saviour of the world, but as *my* Saviour. Who died for *my* sins. Who was crucified for *me*. Who rose from the dead for *me*. Who made *me* His child. And we respond as this man did: ***I believe***. We say it in the Creed every week. *I believe . . .*

And every Sunday, Jesus comes to us with His healing for our sin and death. We hear His Gospel, all that He has done for us, and say: *yes, I believe. For me*. We hear His absolution and say: *yes, I believe. For me*. We receive His Body and Blood and say: *yes, I believe. For me*. And our guilt is taken away. The judgment on us is: *forgiven*. Because of

my sin, there is the disease and death I deserve. But because of the mercy of God, I receive not what I deserve, but what I don't: forgiveness, life, and salvation. We poor, blind beggars now see Jesus, here, where He is for us in water, words, and bread and wine. And we will see Him forever where He will no longer be hidden in these things, but glorious. **We are given the gift of sight to see the gift of God.**

But for now we live in a time where there is much we cannot see. President Trump has taken to calling this virus our "invisible enemy." You can't see it coming. You don't know who has it or where it is. And that's part of what makes it so frightening. We can see signs, but we don't really know.

Some would say that Jesus is the same way - an invisible *friend*. With us, but you can't see Him and you don't really know where He is.

But though we cannot see Him, He is not so invisible as some might think. And we *do* know where He is; where He has promised to be for us. So here, perhaps it would be good to remember the three ways we think and talk about the kingdom of God, how Jesus is ruling as king and acting for us in this world and life - His kingdom of power, His kingdom of grace, and His kingdom of glory.

God's **kingdom of power** is everywhere Jesus is ruling with His power - and that is everywhere. There is no place He cannot reach. And with His power He is breaking and hindering the plans and purposes of the devil, He is healing the sick, and directing all things for the good of His Church. And this work is something visible to us, though sometimes invisible.

God's **kingdom of grace** is everywhere Jesus is ruling with His grace - and that is specifically the Church. For in His Word and Sacraments is where God has promised to be with His forgiveness, life, and salvation. So we don't have to wonder where the forgiveness, life, and salvation we need are - we know. We can see them. They are here, for us. As He promised.

And then there is God's **kingdom of glory**, which is heaven. We can't see that yet, but we will. At the time set for Jesus to come again, when there will be a new heavens and a new earth. A heavens and earth made new and set free from its bondage to sin - including pandemics. Yes, this too is going to end at the time set by God. So until then, we wait and we trust. We trust in His **power** as He rules the heavens and the earth. We trust in His **grace** and He forgives our sins and gives us life. And we trust in His **glory** - the glory of His cross, His selfless, self-giving love, as He came to provide a home for us, is even now preparing that home for us, and preparing us for that home.

How long will that be . . . ?

Something happens every generation to make us think: *soon!* Luther thought that with the Turks warring and invading and then the plague that swept through Europe, the end must certainly be near. The thirty years war was so devastating it seemed like the beginning of the end. World War 1 was the “war to end all wars.” Except it was followed by World War 2 and then the devastation of the Spanish Flu. The A-bomb must surely be the end . . . or 9-11 . . . or the terrible, devastating tsunamis and hurricanes we’ve had . . . or now this virus. But none of us knows when the end will come. Or how.

But if all these things make us flee to Christ and His promises, that is good. For He is the only refuge that can protect and shield us through it all. And whatever else comes next. And then when the end comes, what we cannot now see we will see, and will see forever.

So this story of the man born blind, it’s really our story as well. We were born blind, but now we can see our Saviour. We are outcasts of sin welcomed by Him. We are guilty, but now absolved of our sin, guilt, and shame. **The gift of sight to see the gift of God. Lord, I believe.**

Lord, I believe in times of worry and fear.
Lord, I believe in times of pandemic and turmoil.
Lord, I believe in times of disaster and tragedy.

Lord, I believe You are greater than all these things.
Lord, I believe Your forgiveness is my hope.
Lord, I believe that as Your cross led to Your resurrection,
so too the crosses we bear now are for our life as well.

Lord, I believe, for You have given me sight. To see Your love. To see Your mercy. To see Your Son and Him crucified for me. To see that in Him, I am safe and secure in all places and at all times. No matter what comes next.
Lord, I believe.

So be wise, be careful, be safe, and be smart, but do not fear.

Come and receive the Body and Blood of Your Jesus who has washed you, forgives you, and now feeds you with Himself. That you may see Him and rejoice in Him. Even in days like these.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.