

Order of Worship for March 19, 2023

Prelude:

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn: “O Son of God in Galilee” – Hymn #841

Confession and Forgiveness p. 151

Service of the Word

Entrance Psalm:

P: My eyes are ever toward the LORD,

C: for He will pluck my feet out of the net.

P: One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after:

C: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in His temple.

P: For He will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble;

C: He will conceal me under the cover of His tent; He will lift me high upon a rock.

P: And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;

C: I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

**ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: My eyes are ever toward the LORD,

C: for He will pluck my feet out of the net.

Kyrie: (*Lord, Have Mercy*) p. 152

Salutation: p. 156

P: Let us pray.... Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Hymn of Praise: “Word of God, Come Down on Earth” - Hymn #545

Old Testament Reading:--Isaiah 42:14-21

R: For a long time I have held My peace; I have kept still and restrained Myself; now I

will cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant. 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, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them. They are turned back and utterly put to shame, who trust in carved idols, who say to metal images, "You are our gods." Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is blind as My dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD? He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. The LORD was pleased, for His righteousness' sake, to magnify His law and make it glorious.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God

Epistle Lesson:--Ephesians 5:8-14

R: For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

R: This is the Word of the Lord'

C: Thanks be to God.

Holy Gospel:-- John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the ninth chapter

C: Glory to You, O Lord. (sung)

P: As [Jesus] passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And Jesus' 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." Having said these things, He spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then He anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. . . .

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "Jesus put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for He does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about Him, since He has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." . . .

They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast

him out.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him Jesus said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen Him, and it is He who is speaking to you.” He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped Him. Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord

C: Praise to You, O Christ. (sung)

Sermon Hymn: “*God Moves in a Mysterious Way*” – **Hymn #765**

Sermon: “*Reading God*” - **John 9:1–7, 13–17, 34–39**

Can you read this paragraph?

Aocdrnig to rscheearrch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn’t matter in what order the ltteers in a word are, the only iprmoetnt thing is that the frist and lsat ltteer be at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a total mses and you can still raed it wouthit a porbelm. This is bcuseae then human mind deos not raed ervey lteter, but the word as a wlohe.

Amzanig huh?

Seeing is not just a matter of our eyes. It is what we do with what our eyes take into our brains. Think of an official’s call at a basketball game. The call is “good” or “bad” depending on whether or not it helps our team. A police car’s lights are good when my car is stalled and bad when I’m 5 miles over the speed limit. A tax break is good when I pay a lot of taxes and bad when it jeopardizes the assistance I get for tuition from the government or when my job depends on that tax revenue. So how do we “see” God?

The Jewish religious leaders that Jesus encountered in John 9 saw God as good to the good and bad news to the bad. The reason they had wealth and prosperity was because they followed God’s law and deserved His blessing. The reason the blind man was blind and that other people had disabilities and sickness, poverty, and hard lives was because they or their parents were bad and God was justly punishing them for that evil. The religious leaders were a lot like Job’s friends. They were convinced that the reason Job suffered is because He must have done something wrong. They “read” God that way because it assured them of having the God they wanted—a God who would bless them according to their standards.

Melanie is a middle-aged woman who “read” God a lot differently. Melanie wanted to be a mother. She didn’t marry until she was in her 30’s, so to beat the biological clock she and her husband immediately tried to have a baby. After three years with no success they discovered that because of a medical condition, they would probably

never have a child. But remarkably, she got pregnant. She thought it was a miracle. Her pregnancy went forward with no complications, but in delivery the umbilical chord wrapped around the child's neck and choked her to death. Why would God allow them such great joy only to take it away? Relatives of those killed in the Turkish-Syrian earthquakes are asking, "Why God?" They read God the way Job did, that God doesn't care.

But how do we read God? The Jewish leaders and Job's friends saw that their prosperity came from God. Job and Melanie and victims of war, injustice, and poverty see evil from God. But so often we see nothing from God. We are blind to God, not because God isn't there, but because we have everything else on our minds. We become blind, not because like the blind man Jesus healed we can't see or because like the Jewish leaders we want to see God our way, but often because we don't bother looking.

Norman Lear, the famous television producer who made "All in the Family" and other comedies, wrote about his fear of our culture's lack of attention span. He blamed it on TV commercials that interrupt our thoughts every 6-10 minutes. We often lose the capacity to concentrate on reading a book or studying for extended periods of time.

With all the things that distract us every day, it can be hard for us to concentrate and "read" God. Christian writer Max Lucado talks about when we experience a simple blessing like the sight of the first spring bulb or the feel of the warm rays of sun. He urges that then we need to "be speechless and remain that way. Say nothing and listen as heaven whispers, 'Do you like it? I did it just for you.'" But so often there are too many interruptions as we go on to the next thing in life. God's there, but we don't bother to "read" Him.

But the man born blind did "read" God. The man who could not see, did see. How? Jesus said, "For judgment I have come to this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." The way to "read" God is not through wealth, intelligence, common sense, or education. It is through Jesus Christ. The man could not see, but he looked to Jesus in faith. The blind man obeyed when Jesus told him to wash the mud Jesus put on his eyes. Then he could see! But as much as he was healed from physical blindness, even more before that we were put right with God. He could "read" God. That's why, unlike the Jewish leaders, the man could see that Jesus was from God and believe when Jesus told him that Jesus is God.

The Jewish leaders couldn't see that, not because they were ignorant or couldn't see the evidence of this healed man right in front of their faces. To accept Jesus meant that they would have to admit that they weren't "good" and deserving of God's blessings. They could "read" a God that they wanted Him to be. All that they had built up about following all those laws and being better than other people would have to be thrown away to accept Jesus.

And we can't "read" God in Jesus when we demand to know why. We want our answers from God and we fail to see the answer He gives us in Jesus. The disciples tried to explain the man's blindness as the Jewish leaders and Job's friend did by asking, "Did this man sin or did his parents?" Notice how Jesus answered them. Actually He didn't answer them except to say "no" to their explanation. Instead He said, "The works of God will be revealed in this man." Jesus pointed away from the "why" question to Himself. What we "read" in Jesus is what the blind man read. In Jesus we see a God who doesn't answer our "why" questions the way we want Him to, but gives us a better answer—eternal life with him in Christ. We don't know why Melanie lost her baby as Job didn't know why he suffered, but in Jesus we see life beyond all the suffering and pain.

We can't "read" God when we aren't looking. But God in Jesus puts Himself into our world. He "interrupts" the "commercials" in life to help us want to really see and "read" what God offers to us. Just as Jesus approached the blind man, He came to our lives. He said, "I am the light of the world." In the midst of our dark world, He shines. We may be distracted by all kinds of lights—wanting to succeed, be happy, to have enough "stuff" in life. But those only lead to the darkness of death. Jesus has come to shine so we can "read" God.

If we are asked to draw a picture of a person's face, we normally put the eyes near the top, the nose in the middle, and the mouth below. Actually if you take your fingers and measure down the front of your head, you will notice that our eyes are all at least halfway down, not at the top. We look at faces every day, including our own in the mirror. But our brains "read" that when we draw a face the eyes should be at the top.

So it is with our attempts to "read" life and God. We get it wrong either by building a God who rewards us like the Jewish leaders did, a God who is unjust like Job did, or not bothering to "read" God much at all. But Jesus has come to give us the right "read" on God, where instead of trying to "read" God according to what we think is right, we trust in Him as that blind man trusted in Jesus.

Nicene Creed:

Prayer of the Church:

P: Lord in Your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

Sharing Our Ministry:

Offering and Voluntary:

Offertory: *"What Shall I Render to the Lord"*

Service of the Sacrament p. 160

Preface: p. 160

Sanctus: (*Holy, Holy, Holy*) and Prayer of Thanksgiving: p. 161

Lord's Prayer and The Words of Our Lord: p. 162

Pax Domini: (*Peace of the Lord*) and Agnus Dei: (*Lamb of God*) p. 163

Distribution of Holy Communion:

Hymns: "*Just As I Am*" - Hymn #570

Hymn After Communion: "*Lord, Bid Your Servant Go in Peace.*" #937

Prayer After Communion:

P: Lord God, You showed Your glory and led many to faith by the works of Your Son. As He brought gladness and healing to His people, grant us these same gifts and lead us also to perfect faith in Him, Christ Jesus, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing: p. 166

Closing Hymn: "*Praise the One who Breaks the Darkness*" – Hymn #849

Postlude