

Dear People of God:

Blessed be God who forgives all our sins; God's mercy endures forever.

I was reminded this week, among so many reminders!, of new rhythms being established. I began to ponder these new rhythms against the old ones and found myself seeking eternal everlasting rhythms. Or should I say looking for reassurances of them.

And then I remembered spring, March 20, and I let that hope, that eternal assurance sink into my bones, into my soul. Seasons, and sure enough green shoots became sacramentally visible.

I am fortunate that March 20 is also my wedding anniversary and besides giving thanks to God for David, I also give thanks for the memory of that day in 1976 in Baltimore when the first day of spring came to us with blue sky, sunshine and 85 degrees heat! Needless to say we did not use the heaters dispersed on my family home's porches; what I needed was a different dress!!! Yet somehow those sweaty inconveniences gave way to love and light and deliciousness and beauty which ruled the day.

And then, as we awaited a flight the next morning at the airport hotel, we heard and felt the strangest noises: a cold front swept in and our room and our car were battered by hale, temperatures dropped into the 30's, darkness fell as dramatically as the day dawned!

My point is this: one of the rhythms which lies within the seasons is dawn to dusk, darkness to light. In these times when darkness seems to take up more than its fair share, I am reminded of the hymn *Abide with Me* (a link to it appears below) and especially of the lines: *Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away...Thou changest not; Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes; shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.*

In the midst of these often threatening changes there is God. Expanding upon Elijah, God is in the wind, God is in the seasons, God is in the light AND in the darkness. Today's lectionary is replete with these rhythmic contrasts: light and dark, valleys and hills, safety and threat, hunger and bread, sickness and health. It reads much like the times in which we live!

At its center the Gospel tells the story of Jesus healing the blind man with mud, adamah. And while I have preached on this before, as have others, on this being a story of metaphorical blindness, and while we certainly need to address our blindnesses as we do our trespasses, today I am called to focus on a story of actual blindness told by Barbara Brown Taylor in her book *Learning to Walk in the Dark*. Is that not what we are in the midst of learning now?

She tells the story of Jacques Lusseyran a blind French resistance fighter who wrote *And There Was Light*. His descent into actual blindness occurred after several years of leading a sighted childhood. But that "normalcy" led to a school fight which left him losing one eye and blind in the remaining one.

Like the Bible tells us, blindness led him to the margins of society and was treated as a punishment for some sin. His mother refused to relegate him to chair caning or residential homes for the blind. His father always respecting his dignity reminded him to

He speaks about his deep spiritual life which continued and deepened with his injury. He recalls the greatest gift was not pity, just covenantal love.

Turning to his inner world he made the discovery which would sustain him all his life: "The only way I can describe that experience is in clear and direct words. I had completely lost the sight of my eyes; I could not see the light of the world anymore. Yet the light was still there."

The light was still there...rest there for a moment.

In these times of darkness and gloom may we also know, in ways previously unknown, that the light is still here.

I have spent a lot of time these last few days closing my eyes, often in exasperation, but more often to listen. Music has come to me in new ways. Memories can enlighten the heaviness. Laughter seems to shine like lighting a match in a dark room.

Perhaps this enduring light, the light which Jesus restored with Adamah, earth from which human potential was created to begin with, is the sacrament onto which we might hold these days. It is the outward and visible sign of that grace which while invisible simply does not go away. It causes our hearts to burn even if we are not physically together chewing on bread. It causes our hearts to burn even if we are not physically hugging each other and baptizing each other because in the midst of it a spark of the memory of goodness and dignity and beauty is still there.

I invite you to abide though the darkness deepens. Remember the words "I am with you always." Always. And imagine Jesus wiping your eyes, or your hands, or your feet, with creative, healing Adamah. And imagine closing your eyes and listening for that still small voice, and seeing behind your eyelids something still shining. God is in the darkness.

"Look down O Lord from your heavenly throne and illumine this night with your celestial brightness; that by night as by day your people may glorify your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord." AMEN (BCP)

Prayers

The Collect

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Almighty God to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name. AMEN

Spend some time with Psalm 23 which is appointed for today. (the entire lectionary appears at the end)

The Lord's Prayer

be strengthened by the knowledge that we say this together

Thanksgivings and Intercessions

We give thanks for the blessings of our lives which we now name either silently or aloud. Thanks be to God.

We lift up our desolations and our concern for others especially during this time of coronavirus. We pray for those on the parish prayer list and those we now name either silently or aloud. Be our consolation dear God.

Be our light in the darkness. AMEN

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of God's Son, Jesus Christ. And the blessing of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you always. AMEN

Let us Bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God .

here is a link to Abide with Me which you may copy and paste into your browser

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deJDkU6qiGE>

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Year A

Old Testament

1 Samuel 16:1-13

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." Samuel 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.' Invite 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." Samuel 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?" He 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. When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." But 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.” Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” Samuel 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.” He 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.” Then 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.

The Response

Psalm 23

Dominus regit me

1 The Lord is my shepherd; *

I shall not be in want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures *
and leads me beside still waters.

3 He revives my soul *

and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.

4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I shall fear no evil; *

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

5 You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; *
you have anointed my head with oil,
and my cup is running over.

6 Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, *
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

The Epistle

Ephesians 5:8-14

Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out 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 mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you.”

The Gospel

John 9:1-41

As Jesus 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. The 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?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He 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." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

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. Then 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." Some 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. So 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."

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

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

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