

Barrhaven United Church, Nepean ON
 Worship Service March 22nd 2020
 Lent 4

Minister of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care: Rev. Carla Van Delen

Bold parts are for all to say

OPENING TO GOD'S GRACE

GREETING

May the peace of Christ be with you all.

And also with you

Welcome by Rev. Carla: We are in the midst of an event that has us all feeling at times anxious, or perhaps a bit fearful of the unknown, let us gather as a community of faith: a community of light to those around us.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SILENT REFLECTION¹

I invite you to take a moment now and center yourself deeply in the love of God.

(Some people like to plant their feet firmly on the ground; others like to open their hands. Find the position that is best for you.)

Breathe into your core the life-giving Spirit of God;

breathe out cares and anxieties;

breathe in goodness and truth;

breathe out fearfulness and worry. *(pause)*

Come, and let us worship God.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, as we continue our Lenten journey, no matter how dispersed we may be, remind us that with your love, we have the strength to follow you. As we worship this day, surround us with your presence. Make yourself known to us in what we express, in story and in the prayers we offer. Reveal yourself in the people around us, that we might be reassured that we are not alone on this journey. As we follow you, we are aware that you call us to places we may not always want to go. Be with us and forgive us our hesitation. Renew our resolve and show us the courage to travel with your Son and our Christ, as we seek to grow in faith. Amen.

JESUS PRAYER

You are like our Mother, You are...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

¹ Written by Bob Root, Peterborough, Ont. Gathering, L/E 2020, p. 5 on online version. Used with permission.

LENTEN CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGY: Trust

Reader 1: God has proven trustworthy throughout history, but at times we question and doubt, and even deny, God's presence in our lives. We forget the larger picture at times and focus only on that moment, that period of time, when we experience God's absence. We worry and fret about what is happening and what will happen next, rather than trusting in our Savior.

Reader 2: We light this candle as a symbol of our faith in Jesus Christ that his presence is with us, and that we are not alone.

God of hope, help us to remember the promise that you will never leave us or forsake us. As we journey towards the cross this Lenten season, remind us of your presence, and help us to remember to trust in you. Amen.

ENGAGING WITH THE WORD

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION²

Loving God, we come into your presence today: we are filled with words, and seek silence; we are filled with questions, and seek peace; we are filled with doubt, and seek faith; we are filled with tiredness, and seek rest.

May your Word be all this and more for us today. Amen.

HEBREW SCRIPTURE Psalm 23 (NRSV) *God is my shepherd.*

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long."

CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE (Epistle) Ephesians 5:8-14 (NRSV) *Live as children of the light.*

"For 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."

CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE (Gospel) John 9:1-41 (NRSV) *Jesus heals the man born blind.*

"As he 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

² Written by Susan Lukey, High River U.C., High River, Alta. Gathering, Advent/Christmas/Epiphany (year C) 2015-16, page 35. Used with permission.

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 neighbours 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 worshipped him. Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement 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.'

For the Truth that holds our living,
 For the Truth that challenges and changes us,
 For the Truth that sets us free,
Thanks be to God!³

REFLECTION

seeing those in front of us

Prayer: O Wondrous and ever present God, we give thanks that you are always with us, giving us comfort and reassurance, prodding us to hear and then to live our your message of grace in this world. In Jesus name, may it be so. Amen.

We are indeed living in strange times. Perhaps you are now working from home, trying to find ways of keeping your young children occupied with them out of school and with the daycares now closed. Perhaps you are getting anxious as you wonder how you are going to keep your business afloat or whether your elderly parent in a care home will be able to eat because you aren't able to go in to feed them. Those of you that are extroverts are probably really struggling as you try and find ways of being connected with friends and co-workers. For some being isolated might be your idea of Hell.

But where ever you find yourself, what ever is going through your heart, know that God is with you.

I don't mean this as trite, lollipops, rainbows, unicorns and puppy kisses sort of way. My husband says that sometimes my sunny disposition can be a bit annoying however I love him lots so I can take that from him. I suppose I embrace my faith in a way that encourages me to be on the look-out for those moments of God's presence in each facet of my day. That is why I feel that we can truly experience this moment in our history as a time of grace and compassion. I time where we can be Christ like to one another.

For instance, I give thanks that we live in a world that we care enough not only for our own families but also the families of our neighbors that we are willing to shut things down. To bring things to a halt so that together we can flatten the curve on this illness. That is an amazing thing. That is the kind of country and society that I want to live in.

Are people hoarding things, sure, some of us might be a bit more anxious than others, but we are also setting up times for the elderly and those with special needs to shop in stores under calmer conditions and once again that is amazing. Whether you call yourself Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Pagan or Atheist, that fact that we can all agree to put the good of another before ourselves says that love and grace is woven intricately into this world. Sometimes we get it right better than others, but at least we are trying.

What we are seeing now fits in so beautifully with the story about Jesus curing the blind man. Here was a man that didn't ask to be healed, a man that was suffering not because of anything that we had done, he didn't deserve this illness, and yet Jesus showed him compassion and healed him. Not because the blind man had faith, he didn't know who Jesus was or what his healing meant, but he knew that someone had been kind to him. Someone had seen him, where he was at and offered him healing. His healing was not only physical but also social. As someone on the fringes

³Written by Bob Root, Mark Street U.C., Peterborough, Ont. Gathering: Advent/Christmas /Epiphany 2012-2013 Year C, p. 31 of online version. Used with permission.

of his community, he was one that had probably been ignored by those around him for much of his life.

Playing off this symbol of sight, is Paul's letter from Ephesians where he says that we are to be the light in this world. That our focus on situations and people can bring attention to places that need healing. Our light can focus attention on those in our communities that need to be seen, perhaps for the first time. By believing in God's way shown in Jesus, a way of grace, healing and wholeness, we too can offer good things in this world. To see someone for who they are can be healing. To be truly seen can be life changing.

We might ask ourselves, who are we not seeing? Perhaps it is those that are right in front of us because we don't take the time, because we think it isn't our problem, or none of our business. But now is the time to really see those that we share our communities with, those that shop where we shop, those that walk their dog where we walk our dog, those that live in the apartment right next to ours. It might be the first time in a long time that they too have been truly seen.

Perhaps this time is even providing space to see our loved ones more clearly, without rushing from activity to activity; perhaps we will see our children, or our partner in a new way. Wouldn't that be eye opening?

And so as we move into this new reality, I encourage you to see the people around you. Take the time to call them, or email or to say hi on the street. Make sure you are safely doing so but be creative in the ways that you reach out and interact with the world around you. Also know that you are not alone. We have God that is our Rock and our Shepherd, that one that will guide us through, and we have one another.

God is good. Thanks be to God.

MOMENT OF CONTEMPLATION

RESPONDING TO GOD'S SPIRIT

PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY

Let us pray:

When we aren't sure, God, help us be calm; when information comes from all sides, correct and not, help us to discern;

when fear makes it hard to breathe, and anxiety seems to be the order of the day, slow us down, God;

help us to reach out with our hearts, when we can't touch with our hands;

help us to be socially connected, when we have to be socially distant;

help us to love as perfectly as we can, knowing that "perfect love casts out all fear."

For the doctors, we pray, for the nurses, we pray, for the technicians and the janitors and the aides and the caregivers, we pray,

for the researchers and theorists, the epidemiologists and investigators, for those who are sick...

and those who are grieving, we pray, for all who are affected, all around the world...

we pray for safety, for health, for wholeness.

We also name those that are in our hearts this day.....(names)

May we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked and house those without homes;

may we walk with those who feel they are alone, and may we do all that we can to heal the sick—in spite of the epidemic, in spite of the fear.

Help us, O God, that we might help each other.

In the love of the Creator, in the name of the Healer, in the life of the Holy Spirit that is in all and with all, we pray. May it be so.⁴

SHARING GOD'S SPIRIT WITH THE WORLD

COMMISSIONING AND BLESSING

As our time of worship draws to a close, may we remember to whom we belong, that God is around us, and part of us sustaining us and enabling us to be the body of Christ in our communities. We are not alone.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord shine upon you
and be gracious to you.

May the Lord look upon you with kindness
and give you peace. (*pause*)

And let the people say

Amen.

⁴ Adapted from “A prayer during times of COVID-19” by the Right Rev. Richard Bott, originally posted on Facebook. Moderator Bott encourages the sharing of prayers he posts throughout his term. (March 13th 2020)