

Worship at Home for March 22, 2020

You may choose to read right through this document, stopping for your own reflection at any time, or only read the prayers or the scripture or reflection. You might read with family or friends, or alone. Links will take you to music that may enhance your experience as you move through the worship, but you might choose to visit them later, or not at all. Feel free to share this with anyone who might be interested.

If you'd like to comment or have a question, please email me directly:
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In the Spirit

Rev. Joanne

Centering Prayer

God of our days, our moments, our lives,
send your Spirit to open our eyes and our hearts.
Send your peace, which passes all our understandings,
to still our minds and our emotions.
Send your Chosen One, Jesus - who lived an earthly life,
to accompany us today and all days.
Amen

Opening Music

Bruce Harding: "There is Room for All"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OlyOn1LtSn4>

Opening Prayer

Holy God of hope, we come to you today not gathered, but scattered,
not together in one place, but isolated in our homes, in our rooms,
in our houses and apartments and condos.
Remind us that there are no barriers between us and your love.
Remind us that as we keep safe distance from one another,
our hearts and spirits can still be entwined in faith.
Help us to reach out in safe ways, help us to acknowledge and name
our fears, help us to be your faithful people in frightening times.
Amen

First Scripture Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

God makes me lie down in green pastures;

God leads me beside still waters;

God restores my soul.

God leads me in right paths

for God's own 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.

Take a moment to let the words of this psalm echo in your heart – perhaps read it again aloud, or to someone else if you are not alone. Have you experienced a dark valley in your life? How was God present for you – what were the rods and staffs of comfort that you experienced?

Second Scripture John 9:1-38 A Man Born Blind Receives Sight

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 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.

Reflection

For most of my life, my sight has been 'poor', and I started wearing corrective lenses when I was just seven years old. Recent cataract surgery restored my distance vision when brand new lenses were implanted, and because those lenses were new, colours seemed crisper and more vibrant. I know I am not alone in this experience – many of you have had a similar surgery with similar results.

For me, those first weeks of being able to see without contact lenses or glasses were miraculous. I really lived with a sense of wonder and gratitude, and I can only imagine how this unnamed man born blind must have felt when he could see for the first time. Could he even understand what 'colour' was? Was

it confusing? Did he get an overload of sensory input? Had his brain created images in his mind that didn't match what he now seeing?

We simply don't know. The scripture is without *this* kind of illumination. Jesus, in remarkably human fashion, made the mud, spread the mud and sent the man to wash. "Then he went and washed and came back able to see." He carries on – his life forever altered.

Of course his community reacted, questioning whether this could even be the same person, wondering how this change could have been accomplished, and taking him to the 'authorities' in their lives – their faith leaders – who surely knew all things. They were just as stumped as everyone else, and the rules by which they lived just didn't seem to apply. They were incredulous, and wanted to blame everyone rather than celebrating this mystery of healing. Jesus enters the scene again, and the simple words "Lord, I believe" can be the pivotal point of this story. With eyes of faith opened, even someone born without sight can see God's light.

Where has God's light shone in your life? Have you had an experience of seeing someone, or something, in a new light? How has your experience of the present pandemic and resulting social distancing made you see in a new way?

Of course this story isn't really about 'seeing' in the purely sensory way. Jesus, as he tells us in this gospel passage, is "the light of the world" and our ability to see him as such, to believe, is at the core of our faith. In Jim Strathdee and Howard Thurman's hymn "I am the Light of the World" we get a glimpse of what that could mean for us:

I am the light of the world!
You people come and follow me!
If you follow and love you'll learn the mystery
of what you were meant to do and be.

What are we meant to do and be at this time of upheaval, when each new day seems to change our community's landscape – and for many of us our physical horizons? We can trust that God's light can shine so brightly that perhaps some of our fear and discomfort may dissipate – if only in small ways. God's light shines on and in us when a friend calls or emails, or when you need to do errands and those you encounter smile and keep their distance, when you can sleep in an extra 30 minutes because you don't have to commute, when the highway sounds are diminishing and the skies clearing because fewer cars are on the road. God's illumination can fill us when we honestly name our fears at this time – some of which may have nothing at all to do with the COVID-19 crisis.

When you encounter Jesus – in story, in song, in your spirit, your life may change, your path may diverge – perhaps people won't recognize you, perhaps others will scoff, perhaps you will not be able to explain.

This man born without sight probably never expected his life to change, and I know that I never really expected my life to change the way it has in the last week or so. Can I - can we - let God's light shine in and through us? Can we allow our eyes to become accustomed to the changes around us? We can live in faith, we can live with mystery, we can shine.

May it be so.

Music:

Jim and Jean Strathdee "I Am the Light of the World"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgCYgHZfN-E>

Prayers of the people

Loving and Compassionate God,
these days it can be hard to find something for which we can thank you.
Yet you created our hearts for gratitude, and love, and caring,
and so we try –
thank you for spring's return,
and for the red of robin's breasts returning colour to our yards and sidewalks;
thank you for our friends and families,
even when we must remain separated;
thank you for leaders in our cities, towns, provinces, country and churches
who really are trying to care for us the best way they can;
thank you for health care workers, researchers, doctors and nurses
sometimes putting our needs ahead of theirs in their work;
thank you for the resources of this planet,
which will eventually bring this pandemic under control.

As we give our thanks, God, we also pray for the vulnerable
the fragile,
the frightened,
the lonely who may become lonelier,
the parents and grandparents and grandchildren kept distant from each other,
those whose employment has ended for now,
those who are being called to work in new ways,
those whose procedures, tests or surgeries have been postponed,
and all those who are caring – at a distance- for a loved one who is ill or in hospital.

Gather our prayers, God – today they seem like so many.

Gather us to you, God, and remind us that as you care, we are charged to care for each other.

Amen

Closing music: "Be Thou My Vision" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIMhshpfOY4>

Blessing

As you move throughout your week, know that
God, who sang the universe into being, goes with you;
Jesus, who is God's love song to the world, accompanies you;
and that you are surrounded by the Holy Spirit
who sings God's love into each and every heart,

each and every day. Amen

Taizé Community: "Bless the Lord My Soul"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4Svh-9ohg4>