

Bethel Worship Guide for March 22, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With the news reports dominated by the spread of the Covid-19 virus, with our daily routines disrupted, and our concerns for the wellbeing of ourselves, families, community and world on high alert, the season of Lent may be the last thing on your mind! And yet, here we are, beginning the 4th week Lent. In the Church calendar it is a 6-week season that calls us to turn/return to God our Maker with a spirit of confession and gratitude. During Lent this year we listen to Jesus' conversations (in book of John) as he reveals himself to various people, inviting them to believe. Soon we will watch his journey toward the cross – daring to follow him, but at a distance, wondering ...

This worship guide is an invitation to turn again to the action of prayer and the words of scripture, allowing the Spirit of God to speak to us through them. If there are multiple people in your household, you can take turns reading the parts, and share reflections with one another. If you are by yourself, consider journaling your reflections. Or call someone and read & reflect together over the phone! May you be blessed. -Rebecca

Peace verse – Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Peace! Be still!”

Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. - Mark 4:38

Light a candle in your worship space to represent the Peace of Christ in your midst today.

Call to Praise: (based on Psalm 23)

You, Lord, are my Shepherd; I have everything I need!

You let me rest in peaceful places; you restore the strength of my soul.

You are true to your name, and you lead me along the right paths.

I may walk through valleys as dark as death, but I won't be afraid.

You are with me, and your shepherd's rod makes me feel safe.

You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies.

You honor me as your guest, and you fill my cup until it overflows!

Your goodness and love will pursue me each day of my life,

And I will live forever in your house, oh Lord.

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Our souls are waiting for God, our help and our shield.

Our hearts are glad in you, Lord, because we trust in your holy name.

(name your thanksgivings)

Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us,

even as we wait for you. Amen.

Song (to sing or read) – Open my eyes, that I may see – H #517

Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me.

Place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free.

Chorus: Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.

Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my ears, that I may hear voices of truth thou sendest clear,

and while the wave notes fall on my ear, everything false will disappear.

Chorus ...

Open my mouth, and let me bear gladly the warm truth everywhere.

Open my heart, and let me prepare love with thy children thus to share.

Chorus ...

Prayer of Confession and assurance of pardon:

Remember your mercy, O Lord,

and the love you have shown from of old.

Do not remember my sins; in your love remember me.

(Silent prayer)

You relieve the troubles of my heart,

and bring me out of my distress.

You consider my affliction and my trouble,

and forgive all my sins. Amen.

Gospel reading: John 9:1-41. Like a theatre drama or movie, this story is made up of several scenes (outlined below). As you read, notice how the 'set' changes, who is in the scene, the tone of the conversation, and character development.

Scene 1 (9:1-7) – Jesus meets and heals the man born blind

Scene 2 (9:8-12) – Neighbors question the formerly blind man

Scene 3 (9:13-17) – Pharisees question the man

Scene 4 (9:18-23) – Pharisees question the parents

Scene 5 (9:24-34) – Pharisees question the man a 2nd time

Scene 6 (9:35-39) – Jesus finds and talks to the formerly blind man

Scene 7 (9:40-41) – Jesus talks to Pharisees

Questions for Scripture reflection:

1. Imagine yourself as the man born blind (closing your eyes for a minute may help). How old is he? What has his life been like up to this point? What does it feel like when Jesus puts mud on your eyes? What are you thinking/feeling as someone guides you to the pool of Siloam?
2. As the story progresses, the man's faith (spiritual sight) increases. Look in the text for the words/names he uses to refer to Jesus as the story goes along. How do they change? (See bottom of the Questions section for the names Rebecca identified.*) In what ways has your own faith development been gradual like that of the man's?
3. Is it easy or difficult for you to be patient with other people whose faith is at a different phase of development than yours?
4. What made it difficult for the Pharisees to believe that the miracle had happened and was good, and that Jesus was from God and worthy to be followed? Can you think of times when focusing on "how" or "why" questions made it difficult to see the work of Jesus in your midst?
5. (Okay, this is more of a lesson than a question, but it made me think, so I hope you can get something from it too.) In verse 2, the disciples ask a question, "*Rabbi, who sinned,*

this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” It is a common human reaction to want to understand why things (especially misfortune) happen. Yet asking the question the way they did focuses on placing blame. Jesus’ answer clarifies that the man’s blindness is *not* the result of sin. However, verses 3b-4 are a bit difficult to translate, partly because Greek doesn’t have punctuation. (If you are reading “The Bible Unwrapped” book, this is an example of how “every translation is also an interpretation”, p.64, ch.7). The NIV and NRSV (translations I generally trust) say in v.3: “...but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” (NIV); and “... he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” (NRSV). However, the Greek does not contain the words I underlined above. Those translations can make it sound like the man’s blindness is God’s fault &/or intention! (In my opinion, KJV, Contemporary English Version, and The Message do a better job in this case.) Professor Matt Skinner offered the following translation: “*Neither this man nor his parents sinned. But in order that God’s works might be revealed in him we must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming ...*”. In other words, the important thing for Jesus is not *why* the man is blind; but rather that *the works of God* are about to be experienced by the man and revealed to all. No matter what the circumstances, we must do the work God gave us so that the power and love of God can be revealed.

6. Are there places where you see humor or irony in the story?
7. By about 9:27 the man has become a disciple of Jesus (even before he has physically seen Jesus!) His identity has changed. What impresses, inspires or challenges you about the way he talks (testifies) to the Pharisees in scene 5?
8. What is God’s message or invitation to you through this passage today? How do you want to respond?

*For question 2 above: Words/names identified by Rebecca that the formerly blind man uses to refer to Jesus: v.11 – “the man called Jesus”; v.17 – “He is a prophet”; v.33 “from God”; v.38 “Lord, I believe”.

Song (to sing or read) – Open my eyes, Lord – SS #65

Open my eyes, Lord. Help me to see your face. Open my eyes, Lord. Help me to see.
 Open my ears, Lord. Help me to hear your voice. Open my ears, Lord. Help me to hear.
 Open my heart, Lord. Help me to love like you. Open my heart, Lord. Help me to love.

Suggestions for Intercessory Prayer

Wait for the Lord;
 be strong, and let your heart take courage.

***Hear, O Lord, when we cry aloud,
 be gracious to us and answer us!***

In addition to the prayers included in the “Prayer & Announcement” email, remember also:

- Mary Newcomer’s grand-nephew, 2-year-old Adrien, and his health.
- Ben Ebzly as he mourns the death of his wife Martha.

- Others as you are led ...

God our Shepherd, thank you for giving us what we need.
 Help us to see your vision of a good and loving world;
 guide us to join in the work you are doing.
 In these times of shutdowns and slowdowns,
 when movement is restricted and routines disrupted
 help us zero in on what is essential.
 Thank you that love is also contagious and stronger than any virus.
 You will be with us, and we will be with each other in sickness and in health.
 Thanks be to God. Amen. *

Song / prayer – Gentle Shepherd, come and lead us – H #352
 Gentle Shepherd, come and lead us, for we need you to help us find our way.
 Gentle Shepherd, come and feed us, for we need your strength from day to day.
 There's no other we can turn to who can help us face another day.
 Gentle Shepherd, come and lead us, for we need you to help us find our way.

Closing benediction:

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father,
 who has loved us and through grace
 has given us eternal comfort and good hope,
 comfort and strengthen our hearts in every good work and word. Amen.

Note: The prayer of thanksgiving, prayer of confession, and benediction are taken from *Take Our Moments and Our Days: An Anabaptist Prayer Book*, vol.2, Lent, Wednesday; (published by Herald Press. 2010).

*(prayer adapted from "Lent at Home", and Carol Penner)