

(Intro)

Good morning... or whatever it is as you watch this...

It's an understatement to say we live in a strange and uncertain time. In WI we know about cancelling church for a blizzard, but we're open the next Sunday. Now we're looking at more, and don't know how much more.

I have admired how I've seen pastors and congregational leaders seek to have their people stay connected. Some have launched into providing on-line ways to be together. We here in the synod office decided that in these coming weeks we would provide these recorded worship moments... You may use them as a worship time for Sundays or other times.

The Fact is, being together as people who share the faith is one of the most important things we do, and in a time when that can't happen, we should find other ways... and maybe this can be one of those ways.

So each week we'll send out a little video worship like this – scripture that would be read Sunday... a short sermon on that lesson... a time of prayer together.... And then we'll do it again next week.

Gospel – from John 9, a very interesting story for these times...

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Reading

I'm going to come back to this story of the healing of the man born blind... but not until the end. I want to start with something that happened earlier this month – when I attended a meeting of the bishops of the ELCA (happens 2ce a year).

Craig Satterly, a bishop in one of the Michigan synods, says this story is his favorite in the entire bible. Some of you may know him – before bishop, he was a prof at LSTC.

Might seem strange to hold his story above all others as a favorite... why? CS is legally blind. Hasn't stopped him from being Pr, Prof, Bp... But he sees life and experiences life differently – his blindness gives insights into life and biblical stories that others of us might not catch.

When it comes to this story, here's how Craig sees it differently: The difference between people who are blind and people who see is that blind people know they don't see what's around them. They're aware that this makes them vulnerable, it makes them dependent on others...

- If I'm walking down the hallway and someone has left a broom laying there I step over it, or pick it up. A blind person trips on it.
- When I need to get someplace I get directions and go there; a blind person asks someone to lead them.

We seeing people think we're pretty much in control, a blind person knows she isn't.

You see where this is going... The fact is – none of us really see/understand all that's around us, we see what we're used to seeing, think we understand because our usual life patterns are working for us... but none of us are as in control as we think we are. And in that illusion of security and self-sufficiency... is really just that – an illusion.

Before the COB Craig sent a note on the bishops' listserve – “COB is coming up, strange conference center, I'm going to need someone to help me get from my room to the meals, to meetings, etc” – lots of “I'll do it!” responses... so CS always had someone with him. I, on the other hand, got along just fine – dint need help, knew where to go. Then it dawned on me... CS always had someone with him. I was on my own a lot. Who of us was in the better place???? I was independent. Figured I didn't need anyone.... Who was in the better place????

These days, any illusions we've had about how secure and predictable our lives are stripped away in just a few short weeks... and the future has more question marks than certainties.

- There is lots we don't know – don't know how fast the infection rise will happen... People don't know about their basic well-being, their health, their financial security... hourly workers lose income – those of us told to work remotely watch businesses close – how long until even salaried workers are laid off, What about our churches – lost offerings – events that are important in people's lives not happening!
- I had a nice spring planned – a trip to Florida in April to watch a daughter graduate... then a trip to Norway in May for a granddaughter's confirmation. Both cancelled. Inconvenience for

me – I cancelled the flights and hotels... but what about the workers whose salaries depended on that flight ticket and hotel booking?

- We're facing uncertainties...insecurities... vulnerabilities...

So now let's go back to the story I read – from John 9, the man born blind. The main actors here are (1) Jesus, (2) a man born blind, and (3) the Pharisees.

- The Pharisees are the folks that assumed they saw everything, understood everything.
  - Blind = God's punishment ("who sinned...")
  - Jesus had to be sinner, not prophet, because he did this on the Sabbath
  - Certain of their place of privilege because they were disciples of Moses!
- The blind man, however, was quite aware of only one thing – that he couldn't see, and now he could, just because he had followed Jesus' directive.
  - He made no presumption that he knew anything about how all this came about... but he wouldn't let go of that one fact that he knew Jesus had given him the gift of seeing.
  - He knew he was vulnerable; he knew he depended on Jesus for what happened, and he wouldn't let go of that.

And that's the nature of faith. To know that we are vulnerable, that we're never as secure as we usually think we are... and that ultimately our security comes from the God we have met in Jesus, this same Jesus who met the man born blind.

I know most of you who are watching this are people who remind yourselves again and again of your dependence by being together with your brothers and sisters in your community of faith. And now that's not happening. But it may be that God is using this as a time to help you see in new ways – to find you can create community in new ways.

So how about this...

- Think of the people you would have shaken hands with at Church on Sunday. So replace the handshake with a phone call – “How you doing?”
- In church, you would have heard prayers lifted up for your community. So who or what you might have prayed for. And send them a note – email, handwritten...
- Maybe you might have pitched in to help something happen at church or work or for some event at school... so who else could use a good deed, a little help running an errand or taking on some housekeeping task – a neighbor or ???

When things were going well, maybe we were blind to things we hadn't bothered to see. And maybe God is using this time to open our eyes to other things that can bring new life to you and others.

Lots may be seeming to be falling apart these days. But it may well be that God can use these times to help us see things with new eyes.

- Don't lose your connection with your church, your community of faith. Stay in touch. When canceled services mean lost

income, work to find ways you and others can give your support. Give more if you can, to make up for those who can't give...

- Use the telephone to replaces person-to-person fellowship; it can work! Send notes. Stay connected.
- Anticipate Easter! I don't know if we will be gathering together by Easter, or not. I know one pastor who has said that whenever the first Sunday is that we are together, that will be Easter – a resurrection, new life, gathered once again around the table of the Lord.

We are still God's people. God's *gathered* people, because it is the Spirit that gathers us, not just buildings.

So we care for one another, we recognize our vulnerability, and we celebrate that even in these days, God can be with us, and heal us.

God works that way...

Let's pray....

O God our Healer, show your compassion for the whole human family that is in turmoil and burdened with illness and with fear. Hear our cry, O God. **Listen to our prayer.**

Come to our aid as the coronavirus spreads globally, heal those who are sick, support and protect their families and friends from being infected. Hear our cry, O God. **Listen to our prayer.**

Grant us your spirit of love and self-discipline so that we may come together, working to control and eliminate the coronavirus. Hear our cry, O God. **Listen to our prayer.**

Make us vigilant, attentive, and proactive in the eradication of all diseases, malaria, dengue, HIV & AIDS, and others [may be named out- loud or in silence]... that create suffering and often result in death for many people. Hear our cry, O God. **Listen to our prayer.**

Heal our self-centeredness and indifference that makes us worry only when the virus threatens us, open ways beyond timidity and fear that too easily ignore our neighbor. Hear our cry, O God. **Listen to our prayer.**

Strengthen and encourage those in public health services and in the medical profession: care-givers, nurses, attendants, doctors, all who commit themselves to caring for the sick and their families. Hear our cry, O God. **Listen to our prayer.**

Inspire, give insight and hope to all researchers focused on developing a vaccine. Hear our cry, O God. **Listen to our prayer.**

Sustain all workers and business owners who suffer loss of livelihood due to shut-downs, quarantines, closed borders, and other restrictions... protect and guard all those who must travel. Hear our cry, O God. **Listen to our prayer.**

Guide the leaders of the nations that they speak the truth, halt the spread of misinformation and act with justice so that all your family may know healing. Hear our cry, O God. **Listen to our prayer.**

Heal our world, heal our bodies, strengthen our hearts and our minds, and in the midst of turmoil, give us hope and peace. Hear our cry, O God. **Listen to our prayer.**

Hold in your gentle embrace all who have died and who will die this day. Comfort their loved ones in their despair. Hear our cry, O God. **Listen to our prayer.**

Remember all your family, the entire human race, and all your creation, in your love. **Amen.**

-Dirk Lang, Lutheran World Federation

## **Gospel: John 9:1-41**

*Jesus heals a man born blind, provoking a hostile reaction that he regards as spiritual blindness to the things of God.*

<sup>1</sup>As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." <sup>6</sup>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, <sup>7</sup>saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. <sup>8</sup>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?" <sup>9</sup>Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." <sup>10</sup>But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" <sup>11</sup>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." <sup>12</sup>They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

<sup>13</sup>They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup>Now it was a sabbath day when

Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup>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." <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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."

<sup>18</sup>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 <sup>19</sup>and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" <sup>20</sup>His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; <sup>21</sup>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." <sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

<sup>24</sup>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." <sup>25</sup>He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I

see.”<sup>26</sup> They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”<sup>27</sup> 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?”<sup>28</sup> Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.<sup>29</sup> We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”<sup>30</sup> The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.<sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.<sup>32</sup> Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.<sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”<sup>34</sup> They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

<sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”<sup>36</sup> He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”<sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”<sup>38</sup> He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.<sup>39</sup> 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.”<sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”<sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, “If you were

blind, you would not have sin. But since you (see, you do have sin...)

## **First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13**

*Samuel anointed David even though he was the eighth-oldest son of Jesse and did not match his brothers in height or other physical characteristics. With the anointing came endowment with the Spirit of the Lord, designating David as the Lord's chosen successor to Saul.*

<sup>1</sup>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." <sup>2</sup>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.'" <sup>3</sup>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." <sup>4</sup>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?" <sup>5</sup>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.

<sup>6</sup>When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before

the Lord.” <sup>7</sup>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.” <sup>8</sup>Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” <sup>9</sup>Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” <sup>10</sup>Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” <sup>11</sup>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.” <sup>12</sup>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.” <sup>13</sup>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.

## **Psalm: Psalm 23**

*You anoint my head with oil. (Ps. 23:5)*

<sup>1</sup>The Lord | is my shepherd;

I shall not | be in want.

<sup>2</sup>**The Lord makes me lie down | in green**

**pastures**

**and leads me be- | side still waters.**

<sup>3</sup>You restore my | soul, O Lord,  
and guide me along right pathways | for your  
name's sake.

**<sup>4</sup>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. R**

<sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence | of  
my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup  
is | running over.

**<sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all  
the days | of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of  
the | Lord forever. R**

## **Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14**

*Because we now live in the divine light which is Jesus Christ, we conduct our lives in ways that reflect the light of Christ, so that our activity is truly pleasing to God.*

<sup>8</sup>Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—<sup>9</sup>for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. <sup>10</sup>Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup>Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup>For it is shameful even to mention what such

people do secretly; <sup>13</sup>but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, <sup>14</sup>for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”