

Reflection for Sunday March 22, 2020 (based on John 9 & Ephesians 5:8-14)

Live as children of light... (Ephesians 5:8)

It is now day 7 of our self-isolation and I am missing my daily walk. The chance to put my face up towards the spring sun and feel its approaching warmth. To see that same warmth melt the lake ice and shimmer on the emerging water. (Has the lake thawed yet?)

The only time I've been outside was to put the garbage out last Monday (when it was dark and no one was around) and to occasionally step into the back yard with the dog, who looks at me wonderingly as to why I would hang out in her territory.

These are not complaints, but rather an acknowledgment of my growing awareness of how meaningful and necessary it feels to be outside, to feel the light of the sun on one's face.

Today's readings, especially the gospel and the epistle, call me to pray for God to shed light into my own vision of these peculiar and unusual days.

Help me, O Lord, to see through the darkness of my own fear and worry. Help me to see the ways in which you present yourself to this world - through the caring hands of strangers, through the tireless work of researchers, through the generosity of neighbours and through the astounding ways in which our natural world is healing as we retreat from our frenetic activity as humans.

Covid-19 is not a good thing. Economic recession is not a good thing. A man born blind is not a good thing. Yet in the midst of these realities that bring death, hardship and suffering, there are these moments of light. There are these moments when God breaks through and suddenly we can see in new ways and what we see is beautiful.

I struggle with Jesus's explanation of the reasoning for the man's blindness from birth. Jesus says, "*he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.*" (John 9:3) Jesus has made it clear that the man's blindness is not a punishment for his or his parent's sins - a common belief in ancient Israel. An unfortunate and false belief that often lingers today.

Did God cause this man to be born blind so that Jesus could show off his miraculous powers? Despite Jesus's comment leading us to this conclusion, I don't believe so, nor do the majority of biblical scholars. Everything we read in scripture must be understood in light of the whole, and in light of growing awareness and understanding of who God is and how God works in our lives.

The initial question about who sinned to cause this man's blindness was an attempt to draw Jesus into a theological debate about the causes of suffering (a debate, or conversation, that has never ended). Jesus is, essentially, saying "No one's sin caused this man's blindness. But because he is blind, God's love, mercy and healing can be made evident."

The truth is - whether it is Covid-19 or blindness from birth - we are not going to conclusively and satisfactorily understand why suffering happens. If we believe the whole narrative of scripture, even just metaphorically, it should be argued that God tried to protect us from this (way back in the garden). And, ever since we opened ourselves to suffering, God has tried to relieve, protect and lead us away from suffering.

Inevitably when life throws such terrible suffering at us - the death of a loved one, a terminal cancer diagnosis, untreatable mental illness, crippling poverty, hunger or a pandemic - we want to make sense of it. It is a normal and healthy response to life being out of control.

When we finally come to the understanding, however frustrating it may be, that we cannot conclusively put a rational explanation around what is unfolding, we are then invited into Jesus way. That is the way of seeking how God will act within the current reality. What will God do? How will God reveal love and mercy and compassion and healing?

This is the light we need to be seeking - to both see and to reveal!

Here are two prayers from a worship resource that I often use. They are for this week's readings, but were written last year some time - long before Covid-19. I invite you to sit with them and pray them this week. And I invite you to share the ways in which God brings light to your life and the surprising things you see, even in the midst of terrible suffering.

Show me your way, O God, my Shepherd. Open a right path and let me hear your call to follow. Show me your way, O Christ, my Healer. Open my eyes to the needs of my world. Amen.

Visionary creator, give us your vision.

Show us our hearts, our homes, our communities, and our world through your eyes.

Wash away our blind spots, and help us to see where we do not see.

Allow us to see creation as you see it now, and as you envision it to become.

Help us realize your vision, and walk the road of life - the way and path of Jesus. Amen

(from: The Abingdon Worship Annual, 2020)

(As an aside, our self-isolation has been absolutely necessary. Both my daughters have been sick since returning home. Amelia is getting better it seems. Rachael is not doing so well, but still at home (in Winnipeg). It appears they both contracted Covid-19, but we are not able to know for certain because of limited testing so far. Your prayers, especially for Rachael and her partner who is also now showing symptoms, and for all who are suffering, are appreciated.)