

Sunday, March 22, 2020

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

Safe in the Dark with Jesus

We are experiencing unprecedented circumstances. The times we thought were good are bringing about health and economic change as the world turns each day. These thoughts and expressions are being shared on social media. Even our church people stated, we'll be ok- for when has the church been closed by health authorities before?

Other thoughts have been shared through various social media: everything from "I thought I was asymptomatic but then I felt ill later on. " What do you mean their closing the borders? Just how low will the price of gasoline go? I don't remember gas prices this low-ever? No we have no toilet paper. And even yes the Downtown Mission needs your help = they are running out of food to help those who are the vulnerable and at risk-- yes you can drop it off and it will be greatly received. To no honey, we don't know how long this will last. But what is encouraging is that there are signs of hope- and healing and there is change coming in our world! Heal our land; hear us O Lord heal our broken land O God!

Welcome to spring 2020 in Canada- snow is melting, birds are singing, crocuses are blooming and there are signs of hope all around us. We are on a Lenten journey like no other. When Jesus was directed by the Spirit to go into the wilderness for 40 days he was in some ways experiencing a quarantine, a self isolation, a time of learning on one's own and a time of reconnecting with God the Father. We too have been hearing government leaders around the world directing us to stay at home, to only venture out as needed for food and general supplies and to take this time of 3 weeks to stay well, to work from home as one is able, and to focus on our health. But what is different for those who are on this Lenten journey of faith with Christ leading us, is that we know that what lies ahead is filled with hope and the good news of Jesus resurrection from death. We also know that in these Lenten days, the light of day grows stronger and with this light, there is life and new hope.

This hope comes from the knowledge we have as believers that we live by faith and know that we walk in the light of Christ. But how are we able to share and show this faithfully when we cannot leave our homes except for basic activities? So many activities and events have been cancelled right now what can we do? We can live in the moments in which we are blessed.

Just like the moment when Jesus made mud pies and enabled a man blind from birth to see. What happened in that moment changed everyone involved- Jesus, the blind man, his parents, the neighbours, and even the Pharisees and skeptics of the day.

Jesus was walking with his disciples when he saw a man who was blind from birth. The disciples asked Jesus who had sinned and caused this man to be blind. For this was the theology of that time—that sin caused all the negative things and that poor choices resulted in this man's blindness. The disciples wanted to know who was at fault- the man or his parents? But Jesus responds, "Neither. This man was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. So that God might be revealed through him. Had this man's life and his blindness lead to this moment when Jesus walked by? Jesus then states—we must work God's ways when it is day because at night no one can work. This is because no one can see in the dark. Yet here is this man who has lived his entire life in the dark. He was beggar in the streets and known by neighbours and friends. His parents were known but they could not support him as a man and so his only means of survival was to beg in the streets.

This blind man was in darkness but Jesus said, as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. Right then, those who had been with Jesus watched to see what he was going to do. Jesus had explained that this man who was living in darkness was going to have his life changed. Jesus then knelt down to the ground, spit on some dirt, and made mud. He then took the mud pie from his hands and put it on the man's eyes. He then tells him to go and wash and come back to where he was. He did what Jesus told him—how did he know where to go? He knew how far it was to the pool of Siloam; he knew where he had been begging in the street and he knew that where the crowd was standing-for this was where Jesus had made mud. Upon returning, he could see. And he told those who were skeptical- I am the one who was blind but now I see. This man told the story again and again- I was blind and now I see because of Jesus. He had lived in the darkness all his life and now he could see—physically see his community, family and friends. He had received new life and the promise of a life that was not possible before. All because Jesus made mudpies on his eyes.

Of course there were skeptics in the crowd- the Pharisees and even some of the community's neighbours and friends did not and could not believe this was possible. How did mud make eyes which were closed to functioning bring healing? Or was it the mud at all? Maybe it was the hands who had made the mud and in making this mud brought about healing.

Skeptics brought the man who was blind before the Pharisees because not only did they question whether he had been blind at all, that Jesus had healed him, but also because it was the Sabbath. And if Jesus had really healed him, he was not from God because he did so on the Sabbath and was a sinner in their eyes. This divided the crowd and their ideas of Jesus- was he good and from God for healing the man or had he sinned by doing this on the Sabbath? Some of the Jews did not believe that he had been born blind and even questioned his parents. Yes they acknowledged him as their son but being afraid of being excommunicated or expelled from the synagogue community they did not state that Jesus had healed him, but that he was of age and could respond on his own behalf. Their son was a man and they did not have to take responsibility for him any more. After all, he begged for a living for many years.

So again the man was questioned about what had happened. He was asked about Jesus and whether he was a sinner for healing him on the Sabbath. His response was clear- he was blind and now he could see. And when asked again to explain how this could be the man who could now see- asked a question which tested them. This man then asks, "I have told you already (how he could now see) but you did not listen. Why, do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" The man who could now see that he could now live a new life. He did not have to wait for money to be given to him. He could speak for himself as his parents encouraged him to do so, and he was not afraid of telling those listening to him, the truth. I told you. You did not listen. Do you want to be his disciple too?

The unbelieving Jews and Pharisees are now pushing the formerly blind man to the edge. The edge of a new beginning and the edge of where he will find Jesus to lead his life. For this man who lived in the dark now could see what they did not. He stated, "You don't know where he comes from and yet he opened my eyes. God does not listen to sinners but he does listen to the one who worships and obeys his will. But they did not like this and they drove him out as he tells them again, that Jesus is a man from God and did something wonderful- he healed him.

But the story does not end there- Remember that the man who was healed by Jesus had not seen him before. He was blind and had mud on his eyes; he washed in Siloam and went to where the crowd was where people asked him questions. He was then driven away. Jesus found him and asked directly, "Do you believe in the Son of Man? Who is he- Tell me so I may believe in him. You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he. This man says, "I believe, Lord, "and worshipped him.

Jesus then states, 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 heard these words and said, “Surely we are not blind are we? Jesus said, “If you were blind you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We see, your sin remains.” Or simply put, if it fits so be it!

In these wilderness type days- when we are unsure of what to do we often focus on what we cannot do. The man Jesus healed had been born blind. But he could do so much—he could talk, and listen and he supported himself. He knew his parents could no longer look after him but he still cared for them. He knew the streets of the community where he lived and he knew the voices of his neighbours and friends. He knew how to care for himself as he walked to the pool of Siloam without a problem and he knew that the Son of Man was the messiah for he had heard it in the street that Jesus was in the city and had taught many people. So when the disciples had noticed him begging in the street, Jesus used his blindness as a means of teaching others and as a result he was healed, and he became a believer.

As we hear breaking news of restrictions and closures, of events and gatherings cancelled or postponed until later in the spring, or even of famous people confirming that they have COVID-19. We've also heard that there have been many people dying of this virus and only essential workers are able to cross the borders, we must look to our world and see what else is coming to light. We've heard the expression, “we're in this together' so when there is good news to share, we must share it.

As of Wednesday March 18, China reported that there were no new cases of people testing positive for COVID-19 and that many people who had this virus are now healing and feeling well after doing what medical leaders suggested what they do. What was learned in China has been shared around the world. Social distancing, self-isolation and even going into quarantine are ways to combat the problem and yet there are also those things which we are able to embrace still. We can enjoy going for a walk outside, listening and playing music, we can sing, laugh, be with family and we can play games, be creative, bake and even just be quiet and feel the sunshine on our faces.

If we believe in the One who brings about healing- with mudpies, with hope and moves people from darkness to light, we need to live as children of light. The fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. We need to find out what is pleasing to God. We are to worship God just like the man who was healed when he saw Jesus' face. He thanked, praised and worshipped him. He believed in Jesus.

As we continue in our Lenten journey we might find ourselves on the edge of believing: we might be in the darkness of uncertainty of tomorrow but there is hope because Jesus leads us and guides us into glory. We are not alone in this journey. All we are asked to do is live and love others and to worship God, praise His name and to pray. Yes, we are safe in the dark with Jesus but to truly live in His light means to have hope beyond all expectations and to know that one day we will be with him on the edge of glory.

Let us come before God in prayer:

Holy God be with us now and hear our prayers. We know that there are many walking in darkness and do not know of Christ's healing touch; for when darkness is sent away light bursts forth in the heart and minds of those who believe. We pray that there will be healing in our world today. That those who do not know Jesus will come to follow his light for a new path is waiting. A path that leads us all to the edge of your glory- a path in this wilderness time that opens hearts, brings forth truth and offers the ability of right living. Hear these words offered in silence as we pray for all to come and be healed. SILENCE In Jesus name we pray. Amen.