

MARCH 19, 2023
FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT
1 SAMUEL 16:1-13



“Have no regard for his appearance or stature”

ST. JOHN
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

10207 Lincoln Trail
Fairview Heights, IL
Telephone 618-397-6323
e-mail– stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com
Website: www.stjohnfairview.org

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: Kindred of God, a new vision of leadership is called forth and God calls upon the least likely, the unheard of, and the humble of heart to assemble to receive anointing.
MANY: In peace, we anoint the forgotten, the youngest, smallest, and unlikeliest of siblings whom God has raised up to serve.

ONE: Though the call may involve risk and danger, we are called to listen, obey, and live a love unwavering.

MANY: In peace, we anoint the disinherited and dismissed.

ONE: God’s call does not depend on our outward appearance or our earthly achievements.

MANY: In peace, we anoint neighbor and kin alike, knowing God looks upon the heart. Let us open our hearts to God this day. Amen.

***PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

Anointed One, your love comes peaceably into our lives if we will but let it. We are so fixated on the gold standard, the familiar, and the safe choice that we often lose sight of what you are raising up right in our very midst. Enliven us with your Spirit this day so that we might get a glimpse of your peace. Take what we might imagine as too small for your kingdom and use it to open the world to your overflowing abundance and provision for all that you have created. In the name of Jesus the Christ we pray. Amen.

***UNISON PRAYER OF TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

God of surprises, we know that we do not often perceive the world as you do. We look to the flashy fame, the grand gestures, optimal achievements, and unreachable standards. Yet, in spite of our misguided reach towards perfection, you give us glimpses of your grandeur and grace. Surprise us yet again this day, O God, that in our complacency which allows us to drift towards the same old ways of faith that we may be transformed anew. Provide us with a new cup of oil that we may be anointed

by your love so that we may set out into your world to bless and anoint others. In the name of the One whose love and peace make all things new we pray. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE/ASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE**

Liturgist: Friends, receive the anointing of God's tender love and forgiveness this day. For God's care and compassion for you abides in your heart today and always.

All: We rise and set out restored and renewed. Amen.

***GLORIA:**

Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near.

As it was from the start so it shall be forever,

One God always here. (repeat two more times.)

(end) One God always here. One God always here.

FIRST TESTAMENT LESSON 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Samuel anoints David

16 The LORD said to Samuel, "How long are you going to grieve over Saul? I have rejected him as king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and get going. I'm sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem because I have found^[a] my next king among his sons."

² "How can I do that?" Samuel asked. "When Saul hears of it he'll kill me!" "Take a heifer with you," the LORD replied, "and say, 'I have come to make a sacrifice to the LORD.'" ³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will make clear to you what you should do. You will anoint for me the person I point out to you."

⁴ Samuel did what the LORD instructed. When he came to Bethlehem, the city elders came to meet him. They were shaking with fear. "Do you come in peace?" they asked.

⁵ "Yes," Samuel answered. "I've come to make a sacrifice to the LORD. Now make yourselves holy, then come with me to the sacrifice." Samuel made Jesse and his sons holy and invited them to the sacrifice as well.

⁶ When they arrived, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, "That must be the LORD's anointed right in front."

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven't selected him. God doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the LORD sees into the heart."

⁸ Next Jesse called for Abinadab, who presented himself to Samuel, but he said, "The LORD hasn't chosen this one either." ⁹ So Jesse presented Shammah, but Samuel said, "No, the LORD hasn't chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse presented seven of his sons to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD hasn't picked any of these." ¹¹ Then Samuel asked Jesse, "Is that all of your boys?"

"There is still the youngest one," Jesse answered, "but he's out keeping the sheep."

"Send for him," Samuel told Jesse, "because we can't proceed until he gets here."

¹² So Jesse sent and brought him in. He was reddish brown, had beautiful eyes, and was good-looking. The LORD said, "That's the one. Go anoint him." ¹³ So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him right there in front of his brothers. The LORD's spirit came over David from that point forward. Then Samuel left and went to Ramah.

EPISTLE LESSON: Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, so live your life as children of light. ⁹Light produces fruit that consists of every sort of goodness, justice, and truth. ¹⁰Therefore, test everything to see what's pleasing to the Lord, ¹¹and don't participate in the unfruitful actions of darkness. Instead, you should reveal the truth about them. ¹²It's embarrassing to even talk about what certain persons do in secret. ¹³But everything exposed to the light is revealed by the light. ¹⁴Everything that is revealed by the light is light. Therefore, it says, *Wake up, sleeper! Get up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*

***GOSPEL LESSON: John 9:1-41**

Jesus heals a blind man

⁹As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who was blind from birth. ²Jesus' disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?" ³Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents. This happened so that God's mighty works might be displayed in him. ⁴While it's daytime, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. ⁵While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶After he said this, he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and smeared the mud on the man's eyes. ⁷Jesus said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (this word means *sent*). So the man went away and washed. When he returned, he could see.

Disagreement about the healing

⁸The man's neighbors and those who used to see him when he was a beggar said, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some said, "It is," and others said, "No, it's

someone who looks like him." But the man said, "Yes, it's me!"

¹⁰So they asked him, "How are you now able to see?" ¹¹He answered, "The man they call Jesus made mud, smeared it on my eyes, and said, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and then I could see."

¹²They asked, "Where is this man?" He replied, "I don't know."

¹³Then they led the man who had been born blind to the Pharisees. ¹⁴Now Jesus made the mud and smeared it on the man's eyes on a Sabbath day. ¹⁵So Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. The man told them, "He put mud on my eyes, I washed, and now I see."

¹⁶Some Pharisees said, "This man isn't from God, because he breaks the Sabbath law." Others said, "How can a sinner do miraculous signs like these?" So they were divided

¹⁷Some of the Pharisees questioned the man who had been born blind again: "What do you have to say about him, since he healed your eyes?" He replied, "He's a prophet."

Conflict over the healing

¹⁸The Jewish leaders didn't believe the man had been blind and received his sight until they called for his parents. ¹⁹The Jewish leaders asked them, "Is this your son? Are you saying he was born blind? How can he now see?"

²⁰His parents answered, "We know he is our son. We know he was born blind. ²¹But we don't know how he now sees, and we don't know who healed his eyes. Ask him. He's old enough to speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they feared the Jewish authorities. This is because the Jewish authorities had already decided that whoever

confessed Jesus to be the Christ would be expelled from the synagogue. ²³That's why his parents said, "He's old enough. Ask him."

²⁴ Therefore, they called a second time for the man who had been born blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know this man is a sinner."

²⁵ The man answered, "I don't know whether he's a sinner. Here's what I do know: I was blind and now I see."

²⁶ They questioned him: "What did he do to you? How did he heal your eyes?"

²⁷ He replied, "I already told you, and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

²⁸ They insulted him: "You are his disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. ²⁹We know that God spoke to Moses, but we don't know where this man is from."

³⁰ The man answered, "This is incredible! You don't know where he is from, yet he healed my eyes! ³¹We know that God doesn't listen to sinners. God listens to anyone who is devout and does God's will. ³²No one has ever heard of a healing of the eyes of someone born blind. ³³If this man wasn't from God, he couldn't do this."

³⁴ They responded, "You were born completely in sin! How is it that you dare to teach us?" Then they expelled him.

Jesus finds the man born blind

³⁵ Jesus heard they had expelled the man born blind. Finding him, Jesus said, "Do you believe in the Human One?"

³⁶ He answered, "Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him."

³⁷ Jesus said, "You have seen him. In fact, he is the one speaking with you."

³⁸ The man said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped Jesus.

Jesus teaches the Pharisees

³⁹ Jesus said, "I have come into the world to exercise judgment so that those who don't see can see and those who see will become blind."

⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard what he said and asked, "Surely we aren't blind, are we?"

⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you wouldn't have any sin, but now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

MESSAGE: "Who is blind?"

If we thought last week's story about the woman at the wall was a drama, this week's story is a drama but it's sprinkled with a little humor. See if you can find it.

This drama has six scenes. Scene one (verses 1-7) is introductory. Jesus and his disciples see a man blind from birth. The only way for a blind person to survive in those days was by begging. (By the way, how would the disciples know he was blind from birth?) The disciples want to discuss the man's malady theologically, but Jesus will have none of it. Instead, Jesus sees the occasion as one in which the works of God can be revealed.

With a procedure very much the same is used by other healers in that day, Jesus restores the man's sight. Making a salve out of mud, followed by washing in the Pool of Siloam. The word means "sent". When the formerly blind man returns with his sight, Jesus has disappeared.

In scene two (verses 8-12), we find the healed man back in his old neighborhood, but not comfortable. Friends and neighbors are disturbed that he is no longer blind. They argue about if this guy is the same man or someone else.

And then they bombard him with questions. Who did it? How? Where is the healer now? (*How would the once blind man recognize Jesus?*) Arguments break out among those who believe the man is healed and those who do not; there is no joy, no praise, no thanking God, no encouragement, only quarreling. (*That's a strange response for the gift of healing.*)

In scene three (verses 13-17), the poor fellow is hauled before the religious authorities. After all, this healing was perpetrated on the Sabbath, and therefore, the healer, if there was one, is a criminal to be punished. (*They don't see the miracle, only the discretion.*) The religious authorities in this terrible crime are divided in how they see this situation, so they ask the man to testify. The man calls Jesus a prophet of God, his testimony is rejected, (*they are blind to the truth.*) They want further evidence. (*Seeing a once blind man healed is not enough.*)

In scene four (verses 18-23), the authorities quiz the parents. (*The Jewish authorities had already decided that whoever confessed Jesus to be the Christ would be expelled from the synagogue. Did they really expect the parents to side with their son with that threat over their heads?*) Is there any wonder that the parents felt intimidated and afraid of punishment by reason of association or consent, they ask not to be involved. A house has been divided over Jesus and his power to help the needy, and the healed man is feeling very much alone.

Scene five (verses 24-34) returns to scene three: the authorities again interrogate the healed man. Pressure builds and tempers flare. The man answers with personal testimony; "I was blind, now I see." He also says that Jesus

must be of God to have the power to heal. You can imagine the response from the religious leaders. That's not what they want to hear. Now they are in a bind; they must accept the man is healed and accept the healer as a person of God, or they must hold to their view of the law concerning the Sabbath and reject the healed and the healer. Heaven forbid that the law is wrong in some situations.

The healed man is excommunicated. And he never asked to be healed in the first place! Those who are blessed by Jesus soon run into trouble in the world because good news has enemies.

In the final scene (verses 35-41), Jesus returns. The healed man meets and confesses faith in Jesus, whereas the oppressors come under the judgment of the revelation of who they really are. They are blind to being compassionate. They want to be right no matter what. And this is the judgment, that "the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light." (verse 3:19). The healing has made it clear; light comes to those who recognize that life is blindness without Christ; darkness comes to those who without Christ claim to see.

Have you had your eyes checked lately? How is your vision? What do you see? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with a time for personal silent prayer.

Gracious and ever faithful God, creator of all gifts to us that we don't deserve. We praise and thank you for your love for us even when we don't "see" the good works you do. Help us open our eyes and take in the beauty of your world.

We gather today to pray for all who suffer from illness, pain, depression, feeling lost, and those who are grieving. May they see your compassionate love and peace you have for them, dear God of all that is good.

Help all of us to be kinder to each other as we see and hear the needs of others; needs that we can provide; food, water, shelter, and companionship.

We pray for all those who live in harm's way in many countries around the world. May their oppressors see that destroying places and people, leave nothing for them to feel victorious because they have destroyed.

We pray all these things in the name of the one who taught us to pray . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: NCH 772 "Nothing Can Trouble"

Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.

Those who seek God shall never go wanting.

Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.

God alone fills us.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

ONE: It is not the outward appearance or size of the gifts we have to share that matters to God. It is the loving generosity of our hearts that is closest to the heart of God.

We are invited to give this day out of the abundance of our lives, from our heart, knowing that no matter the size of the gift that God knows our hearts.

All: We give this day from our hearts and may it be pleasing to God. Amen.

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING**

Generous God, you remind us that you "anoint our heads with oil" and that our "cup overflows" with your abundance. We do not take for granted all that you provide. Take these gifts and use them for the healing and tender care of your hurting world. May your cup of love overflow and abide with the hurting and heartbroken, forgotten and despised, so that we may all be made whole. Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

Kindred, set out from this place not to anoint power, prestige, and the outer appearances of grandiosity. Rather, set out from this place to anoint healing, renewal, and raise up those unexpected places and people that God has set apart for the transformation of the world. Open yourselves to the surprising and unexpected movements of the Holy Spirit, for around the corner of every assumption we carry and every community we live in, is a small shepherd among us waiting to lead with God's help. Go forth in peace to lead, to love, and be renewed by God. Amen and Amen!

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, David Seneczyn, Theo Mally, Becky Ballard, Rosemary Williams, Jack O'Day, Ronald Bopp, Syd Safriet, and Nancy's friend Mary.