

**MARCH 15, 2026**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT**



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(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

\*Please stand if comfortably able  
and respond with words in bold print

**SUMMARY OF TODAY'S SCRIPTURES**  
**From "Preaching Through the Christian Year"**  
**Fred Craddock**

**1 Samuel 16:1-13** This reading continues the Lenten recital of ancient Israel's history. With the report of the election and anointing of David to be king, 1 Samuel 16 takes us from the wandering in the wilderness, beyond the settlement in the land, and to the next decisive turning point – the establishment of the monarchy.

**Psalm 23** this Psalm expresses the deepest possible trust in the Lord.

**Ephesians 5:8-14** this passage and the Gospel contrast light and darkness. Ephesians 5 is a call for the faithful to forswear the "unfruitful works of darkness," for they are now "children of light."

**John 9:1-41** John 9 contains the account of Jesus' healing of the man born blind, including the debate with the Pharisees over the blind man's guilt and the authority of Jesus.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:**

**THE BELL IS RUNG:**

**PRELUDE: "The King of Love My Shepherd Is"**  
**Hugh S. Livingston, Jr.**

**PENNIES FOR MISSION:**

One Great Hour of Sharing

**\*RESPONSIVE 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.

**\*OPENING HYMN: "Open My Eyes, That I May See"**

**Clara H. Scott (1841-1897)**

Open my eyes, that I may see  
glimpses of truth you have for me.  
Place in my hands the wonderful key  
That shall unlock and set me free.  
Silently now, on bended knee,  
ready I wait your will to see;  
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my ears, that I may hear  
Voices of truth you send so clear;  
And while the message sounds in my ear,  
Everything false will disappear.  
Silently now, on bended knee,  
ready I wait your will to see;  
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my mouth, and let me bear  
Gladly the warm truth everywhere;  
Open my heart, and let me prepare  
Love with your children thus to share.  
Silently now, on bended knee,

ready I wait your will to see;  
Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!

**\*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**

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.  
Let us 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.**

**SCRIPTURE LESSONS**

**FIRST TESTAMENT LESSON: 1 Samuel 16:1-13**

**from the "Message"**

**God Looks into the Heart**

**16** God addressed Samuel: "So, how long are you going to mope over Saul? You know I've rejected him as king over Israel. Fill your flask with anointing oil and get going. I'm sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I've spotted the very king I want among his sons."

<sup>2-3</sup> "I can't do that," said Samuel. "Saul will hear about it and kill me."

God said, "Take a heifer with you and announce, 'I've come to lead you in worship of God, with this heifer as a sacrifice.' Make sure Jesse gets invited. I'll let you know what to do next. I'll point out the one you are to anoint."

<sup>4</sup> Samuel did what God told him. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the town fathers greeted him, but apprehensively. "Is there something wrong?"

<sup>5</sup> "Nothing's wrong. I've come to sacrifice this heifer and lead you in the worship of God. Prepare yourselves, be consecrated, and join me in worship." He made sure Jesse and his sons were also consecrated and called to worship.

<sup>6</sup> When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, "Here he is! God's anointed!"

<sup>7</sup> But God told Samuel, “Looks aren’t everything. Don’t be impressed with his looks and stature. I’ve already eliminated him. God judges persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; God looks into the heart.”

<sup>8</sup> Jesse then called up Abinadab and presented him to Samuel. Samuel said, “This man isn’t God’s choice either.”

<sup>9</sup> Next Jesse presented Shammah. Samuel said, “No, this man isn’t either.”

<sup>10</sup> Jesse presented his seven sons to Samuel. Samuel was blunt with Jesse, “God hasn’t chosen any of these.”

<sup>11</sup> Then he asked Jesse, “Is this it? Are there no more sons?”

“Well, yes, there’s the runt. But he’s out tending the sheep.”

Samuel ordered Jesse, “Go get him. We’re not moving from this spot until he’s here.”

<sup>12</sup> Jesse sent for him. He was brought in, the very picture of health—bright-eyed, good-looking.

God said, “Up on your feet! Anoint him! This is the one.”

<sup>13</sup> Samuel took his flask of oil and anointed him, with his brothers standing around watching. The Spirit of God entered David like a rush of wind, God vitally empowering him for the rest of his life.

Samuel left and went home to Ramah.

**RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 23 Page 633**

**EPISTLE LESSON: Ephesians 5:8-14**

<sup>8</sup> You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, so live your life as children of light. <sup>9</sup> Light produces fruit that consists of every sort of goodness, justice, and truth. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, test everything to see what’s pleasing to the Lord, <sup>11</sup> and don’t participate in the unfruitful actions of darkness. Instead, you should reveal the truth about them. <sup>12</sup> It’s embarrassing to even talk about what certain persons do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But everything exposed to the light is revealed by the light. <sup>14</sup> Everything 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**

<sup>9</sup> As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who was blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> Jesus’ disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?” <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents. This happened so that God’s mighty works might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup> While it’s daytime, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” <sup>6</sup> After he said this, he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and smeared the mud on the man’s eyes. <sup>7</sup> Jesus 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**

<sup>8</sup>The 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?" <sup>9</sup>Some said, "It is," and others said, "No, it's someone who looks like him." But the man said, "Yes, it's me!"

<sup>10</sup>So they asked him, "How are you now able to see?" <sup>11</sup>He 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."

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

<sup>13</sup>Then they led the man who had been born blind to the Pharisees. <sup>14</sup>Now Jesus made the mud and smeared it on the man's eyes on a Sabbath day. <sup>15</sup>So 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."

<sup>16</sup>Some 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

<sup>17</sup>Some 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**

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

<sup>20</sup>His parents answered, "We know he is our son. We know he was born blind. <sup>21</sup>But 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." <sup>22</sup>His 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. <sup>23</sup>That's why his parents said, "He's old enough. Ask him."

<sup>24</sup>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."

<sup>25</sup>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."

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

<sup>27</sup>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?"

<sup>28</sup> They insulted him: “You are his disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. <sup>29</sup> We know that God spoke to Moses, but we don’t know where this man is from.”

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

<sup>34</sup> 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** <sup>35</sup> Jesus heard they had expelled the man born blind. Finding him, Jesus said, “Do you believe in the Human One?”

<sup>36</sup> He answered, “Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him.”

<sup>37</sup> Jesus said, “You have seen him. In fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

<sup>38</sup> The man said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshipped Jesus.

### **Jesus teaches the Pharisees**

<sup>39</sup> 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.”

<sup>40</sup> Some Pharisees who were with him heard what he said and asked, “Surely we aren’t blind, are we?”

<sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you wouldn’t have any sin, but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

### **MESSAGE: “Playing the Blame Game”**

*While searching for guidance on how to present this long Gospel story, I came across this message written by Rev. Joe Travis. It was too good to pass up.*

“Our scripture today reminds us of the dangers of casting misguided blame. People blaming others because of their misguided beliefs. Don’t we all have a tendency to play, “The Blame Game”.

This the 4th Sunday of Lent we all need to recognize that our Lord and Savior was sent to the cross because of the blame cast on Him, by the misguided beliefs of the people of His day. And we still today send Christ to the cross placing the blame on Him for our misguided beliefs.

Aren’t we all many times like the little girl who was riding along on her bike when she bumped her head on a low hanging branch of a tree. She ran into the house crying, “Mommy! Mommy, Joey hurt me!”

Her mom looked up from what she was doing. She said patiently, “Sissy, Joey didn’t hurt you. Joey’s not even here. He went to the grocery store with your Dad.”

The little girl got a startled look on her face. Then in a bewildered voice the little girl asked, “Does that mean stuff like this can happen on its own at any time, with no one being at fault?” Her mother answered absolutely. Then she added, “Whoa, bummer!”

Well, it is a bummer. Bad things can happen at any time to anyone and sometimes there’s no one to blame. In today’s text from John’s Gospel, Jesus’ disciples encounter a man blind from birth. The disciples ask Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (9:2)

There it is. **That question:** who is to blame for this man’s misfortune? Somehow if we can just affix blame, we think it will make the situation better. There will at least be some meaning to the event maybe even a solution. If there’s somebody to blame, it means there is a way of gaining control over life. If bad things just happen, with no one to blame, then there’s no control, and that’s scary.

“The Blame Game”. It’s been around since the Garden of Eden. “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” The disciples asked. In reality, it’s an absurd question, of course. How could a man born blind be responsible for his predicament? Did he sin in his mother’s womb? Kick his mother a little too hard perhaps?

If you follow that line of thinking, you’re left with only one viable conclusion it must be his parent’s fault. Can you imagine how hurtful this explanation would be to this

man’s parents? Not only would their precious son never be able to see, but it was somehow their fault. They had offended God sometime in the past maybe without even realizing it and this was their punishment. *(As a nurse, I saw this happen too many times. If a baby is born with a serious condition or just a birth mark, the mothers always want to blame themselves. They must have done something wrong during their 9 month pregnancy. It’s very sad. The mother blames herself for the rest of her life, unless someone corrects her.)*

For most of us, this is an absurd line of thinking. It really makes God look like a second-rate deity. And yet, there are many sincere Christian people who, when something tragic happens in their life ask, “Did I somehow cause this? Is God punishing me for some transgression of which I am not even aware?”

Does God make little children suffer because their parents have somehow offended Him? *(Is God really that mean?)* Well, that may have been the disciples thought process when they questioned Jesus about it.

Jesus’ answer to his disciples’ question is intriguing: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” (9:3)

What does that mean? How can an affliction, particularly one as debilitating as blindness, display the

work of God? Well, let's look for a few moments at the story.

First of all, we see Christ heal this man born blind. That's important. It is not God's will that this man or any man or woman whoever they may be, be blind. Blindness comes from many sources. It might be the result of trauma or disease. In a man born blind, maybe damage to a gene was responsible. We don't know. However, we do know this: if you are blind, physically blind, **you are not that way because God willed it. If you have cancer, or some other adverse condition, it is not because God willed it. If you are going through a devastating time financially, it is not because God willed it.** God's will is always for wholeness and health. God's will **is** for your needs to be met. That is why Christ healed this man. **Healing is God's will.**

And that fact is so important for us to understand. If, when we are going through a time of extreme heartache and we insist on playing, "The Blame Game", we may be cutting ourselves off from the very power that can heal us.

Notice how Christ heals this man. According to our text, he spits on the ground, makes some mud with the saliva, and puts it on the man's eyes. Then he tells the blind man to go wash in the Pool of Siloam.

Now the blind man might have responded to Jesus' actions in many ways. He could have said, "This is dumb. How in the world could putting mud on my eyes heal me?

I'm not going to move one inch. It's ridiculous." That's how many of us might have responded, particularly if we had let our blindness defeat us, make us bitter, cause us to give up on God. That's how this man **could** have responded.

I can't help but believe that this man's healing was connected to the positive way he responded to Jesus' command. John indicates to us that the man immediately went to the pool, washed in the pool, and came home seeing. **He responded in faith and his faith was rewarded.**

We don't know why Jesus used this particular method of healing on this man. I have no doubt Jesus could have simply spoken and the same result would have been accomplished. Maybe it was important to Jesus, to see this man do his part by washing in the pool.

However, here's what the man's healing says to me. If you have some tragedy in your life, or in the life of someone you love, **believe that God's will is for healing. Look for that healing. Work for that healing. Never give up hope.** Just as Christ healed the man blind from birth, God's will **is** for all God's children to be well, to be strong.

Isn't that true of all of life. If you have a hurt of any kind, or a need, of any kind, whether it is physical or mental or emotional or financial or whatever it may be don't sit around wondering who is to blame. Don't sit around feeling sorry for yourself. **Focus on God's desire for healing. Do what you can to bring healing.**

**Focus on it, expect it. At least, believe that God wants to heal your heart, your attitude, your feelings about your hurt or need. Put yourself in a frame of mind to receive whatever healing God may have for you.**

Remember, God can use even the most adverse circumstances, for our best good. That's what Paul wrote to the believer's in Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." God can use even the most adverse circumstances to bring a blessing into our life.

"In all things God works for the good of those who love him . . ." That's a hard thing to remember when you are going through difficult times, but it's true. God can use any circumstance. When you are going through a difficult time, look for some way this can be used to God's glory. Let it make you better rather than make you bitter.

Remember what's written in, Isaiah 65:24. "Before they call, I will answer; while they're still speaking, I will hear." Finally let's look at the most tragic blindness, which is the **blindness of the heart**. It's interesting. This should have been the most joyful day in this man's life. He had been blind all his life. Then, to this man, Jesus came by and did something quite remarkable. He took some dirt and some of his own saliva and made mud. Then he put the mud on this man's eyes and told him to wash in the Pool of Siloam.

So the man did as he was told and then he came home able to see.

That's an extraordinary miracle. **A man who had never seen anything before now had his vision!** Shouldn't someone throw him a party? Well, his neighbors didn't. Some of them refused to believe this was the same man they had known. **It didn't fit their theology. They had never known a blind man who was healed and they refused to accept him. Neither did the leaders of the synagogue. In fact, they threatened to throw him out of the synagogue if he didn't recant his testimony that Jesus had healed him. You see, his neighbors and the leaders in his synagogue were blinder than this man had ever been.**

**They were blind to who Christ was. They were blind to what God was doing in their midst. They let their own petty interests and experiences blind them to a richer understanding of the blessings God had in store for them. They weren't bad people. They were simply locked in to a certain way of thinking about life and about God. They didn't see the bigger picture.**

You and I need to expand our thinking about our lives to seek God's perspective on the things that happen to us. Rather than trying to find someone to blame when something bad occurs in our life, we need to affirm that God's will is always for our best good. God wants us to be well.

God wants to see that our needs are provided.

In times of suffering, remind yourself, first of all, of that truth: **God wants me to be well.** Second, remind yourself **that all things work to the good for those who love God. Look for ways that God can use your present adversity for the good. Perhaps this experience will make you stronger. Maybe this experience will make you more compassionate toward the struggles of others. Maybe this experience will draw you closer to God.**

And finally, pray that God will help you see the bigger picture. Pray that you will sense God's will for your life. It may be that up to this point you, too, have been blind.

**Pray that God will help you see God's hand, God's plan, and your place in it.**

As the prophet Isaiah recorded in 65:24. "Before they call, I will answer; while they're still speaking, I will hear."

And remind yourself of what Paul wrote in, Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Don't play, "The Blame Game." Amen.

**Pastor Joe Travis**

**CHANCEL CHOIR: "Shine, Jesus, Shine" Graham Kendrick**

**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 Creator 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: 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.**

**OFFERTORY: “Shepherd of Love” John W. Peterson**

**\*DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;**

**Praise God, all creatures here below;**

**Praise God above you heavenly host;**

**Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

**\*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.

**\*CLOSING HYMN: 252 “Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us”**

**\*BENEDICTION:**

Brothers and Sisters, 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!

**\*BENEDICTION RESPONSE: 571**

**“O God of Love, O God of Peace” First verse only**

**O God of love, O God of peace,**

**Make wars throughout the world to cease.**

**The wrath of human wrong restrain;  
Give peace, O God, give peace again!**

**THE BELL IS RUNG:**

**\*POSTLUDE: "Paeon" George Blake**

**PRAYER LIST:** Terry Thorpe, Grandson Landon, Lynne Knecht, Becky Ballard, Mary Lou and Urban Baum, Ronald Bopp, Geralyn Gammon, Russ Hartmann, Marilyn Paul, Pam and Syd Safriet, Yvonne Weber, our beloved country.

**DON'T FORGET TO VOTE THIS TUESDAY, MARCH 17.**