

4 Lent
March 22, 2020
Coronavirus Health Crisis

**In the name of the God of all creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

Our Gospel reading this morning raises some intriguing questions, at least for me. A man who was born blind is all at once given his sight. Is there no one even curious about what that experience was like for him? Is there no one to really celebrate this new gift with this man? Instead, a debate breaks out about healing on the Sabbath, and who is at fault for his blindness in the first place, and was this man really the man who was born blind or an imposter. Since the man who was born blind was basically invisible in his society, no one could remember what he really looked like ... they had to ask his parents.

This story raises other questions as well. If this is our story as well as a Jesus story, we have to ask, "To what are we blind to in our own lives?" And, how might an encounter with the healing power of the divine presence in Jesus bring us sight ... seeing things that we have never seen before?

However, all of that is for another time. As they say, "Events have overtaken circumstances." We are in the midst of a health crisis with the CORVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. You are watching this video because St. Cyprian's is not holding corporate worship service until further notice. We have a few people here this morning to assist with elements of the liturgy, yet it is a far cry from the full pews we experienced just a few weeks ago.

I trust you are self-isolating, and when it is necessary to go out into public, that you are observing social distancing and other precautions. I think we all know that this is a rapidly evolving crisis making it difficult to plan even a few days into the future. I pray that all of you will be safe, and that you will stay well. Yet, a question remains ... how do we deal with our spirit in this difficult and sequestering time?

If you are like me, you are confused, anxious, and ... at least at times ... frightened. Uncertainty has a way to doing that to people, and if we are sure of one thing right now, it is that we live in uncertain times.

But, Jesus also lived in uncertain times. He lived in uncertain times and he found a way to fully live in the image of God throughout his journey to the cross. I often use the phrase, "taking seriously what Jesus took seriously." Most of the time I am using it in reference to Jesus' sense of justice. But, how might taking seriously what Jesus took seriously apply to our situation today, and to our inner life that we depend upon in these troubling times?

First of all ... and most importantly of all ... Jesus took seriously his relationship with God. Not only did Jesus fully live in the presence of God, God was fully alive in Jesus. Jesus knew he was a blessed child of God ... that God's Spirit had alighted upon him ... and he lived his life in this perpetual awareness with deep trust.

Jesus experienced that blessing at his baptism. God was upon and within him. Then the Spirit drove (or led) Jesus into the wilderness. Yet, Jesus was fully aware of living in God's presence ... and God's presence was alive in Jesus ... in those very difficult times. Jesus was most fully aware of living in God's presence when he went to the cross. And, God was fully present in Jesus as he suffered and died.

So, taking seriously what Jesus took seriously ... in times like this ... means taking seriously our relationship to the divine presence of God in our lives. It means living as if we are blessed children of a loving God, and that the loving God of all creation is alive in us just as God was alive in Jesus.

How do we do that? Let's look at what Jesus did, and what he took seriously. Jesus grounded himself in prayer. Whenever he was troubled, he found a solitary place and prayed. He didn't have a Prayer Book, but he did have his Holy Scriptures, and I'm sure he used them. His prayers came from his heart and soul ... honestly ... in language beyond language.

So, if we are to take seriously what Jesus took seriously we will pray. Our Book of Common Prayer says, "Prayer is responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with and without words." Your prayer is your prayer. Find God in your life and then respond. Find God in the surprise blessings you see in the world around you. Find God in the things that scare you. Then respond to God by thought and/or by deed. Respond with or without words in any language or non-language you have. Just pray ... it will ground you.

Jesus also took seriously the people around him. He took his disciples seriously. He took the Pharisees and Sadducees seriously. But, he also took seriously those who were all but invisible to others, like the man in the Gospel story this morning who was born blind.

So, as we take seriously what Jesus took seriously ... even in the most dire of times ... remember the people around you and take them seriously. Be especially mindful of those who we sometimes take for granted ... the checkout clerk at the supermarket, the gas station attendant stuck behind a counter, the wait-staff person turned food-delivery driver, and others. Open your eyes to see those who are often invisible ... the persons we avoid seeing ... those to whom we are often blind.

And, as we take seriously the people around us, please be in touch with each other ... with your families and friends ... with the people with whom you shared a pew just a few weeks ago ... even if you barely know them. We are all in this together.

Here is a quote from Paul's letter to the Christian community in Ephesus:

In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing journey. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out. -Ephesians 6:18

So, in this uncertain and unsettling time, trust in God's presence in which you live, and that lives in you. Pray by responding to where you find God in your life, and take seriously the people in your world and beyond ... and let them know you take them seriously.

Speaking of responding to God in prayer ... After I finished writing these remarks this morning Caren and I had lunch on our deck overlooking Lake Maria Sanchez. As I went out the door I could hear a mockingbird sing. Now mockingbirds don't sing during the winter, and they just started singing again this week. This mockingbird sang and sang and sang. It sang every possible song a mockingbird can sing ... and that is a lot. It sang the whole time we were out on the deck. I mentioned to Caren that it sounded like the mockingbird had lots of song stored up from its winter silence. She said, "Don't you think that is how all of us are going to sing when this is all over."

Yes, I do!

Amen.