

First Baptist Church in Needham

Meditations for
Sunday, March 22, 2020
(or whenever you are so led to pause, reflect, and pray)

Fourth Sunday of Lent
Edition 1



Lighting the Candle of Life

(You may wish to light a candle or use the photo of our Candle of Life as a focus.)

All: We light the Candle of Life — a candle that represents community, spirit, and the fullness of all of life — birth and death and all of the transitions in between and beyond.



A Reading from the Gospel of John 9:1-41

(Read the story aloud. Pause and notice what image or word stands out or “shimmers” as you tell the story of this encounter aloud.)

9 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2** His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” **3** Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. **4** We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. **5** As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” **6** When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, **7** saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. **8** The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” **9** Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” **10** But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” **11** He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” **12** They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. **14** Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. **15** Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.”

16 Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. **17** So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He

is a prophet.”¹⁸ The leaders did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight¹⁹ and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”²⁰ His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.”²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the leaders; for the leaders had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.²³ Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.”²⁵ He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

All: The Gospel of our Lord. Thanks be to God.

Time of Reflection

(Choose one or more of the following notes to reflect upon the scripture text. Perhaps write your thoughts, call a friend or family member to discuss it, or allow the story to seep into your imagination.)

- What image, word, or phrase stood out or “shimmered” to me? Reflect on its significance to you today.
- Imagine yourself observing Jesus, the blind man, the Pharisees, and the man’s parents as you stand in the crowd. How do I determine who to believe? How do I discern what is true and what is false, factual or made-up, today? In a world of constant information, how do I know what to believe?
- The religious leaders in the story focus on assigning sin rather than on the joy of a man’s well-being restored to him. When have I “lost sight” of what is truly needed, important, and good this week? How is the impact of social distancing affecting my ability to “see” and participate in everyday joy, compassion, and hope?

Prayers of the People

(If you have been attending Sunday worship, you know our sung prayer that brings us into the time of Prayers of the People. Enter into this time in song. If you don't know the tune, let the words be the doorway to your prayer.)

Sung Prayer

Hear My Prayer, O Lord

BENZENHAFER
arr. Holly C. Benzenhafer

Hear my prayer, O Lord. Hear my prayer, O Lord.
I am asking, hear my prayer, O Lord.

We Hold in Prayer...

Medical personnel and hospital staff who offer continual expertise and care at their own personal risk to the coronavirus, and souls we know personally who are in this group whose names we speak aloud... *Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer...*

Persons with health conditions that put them at greatest risk, and souls we know personally who are in this group whose names we speak aloud... *Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer...*

People working in direct contact with the public to ensure that our needs are met: employees at grocery store, pharmacy, and service providers; restaurant staff and delivery services; school cafeteria staffs and food bank volunteers; veterinarians; hospice and funeral home staffs, and souls we know personally who are in these groups whose names we speak aloud... *Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer...*

For government officials—in Needham, in Massachusetts, and across the United States and the world—who are having to make constant and difficult decisions that impact millions of people's daily lives and future well-being. May they reserve time to rest and sleep, to stay hydrated and healthy, and may, O God, your hand guide them with wisdom and compassion in the weeks and months to come. *Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer...*

For the well-being and health of loved ones who live elsewhere whose names we speak aloud... *Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer...*

For Fayrah Stylianopoulos who celebrated her 16th birthday on March 15. *Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.*

For the ingenuity of technologies that help us stay connected to one another through video, text, email, telephone, and mail. *Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.*

And for the prayers of our hearts that you, Holy One, know even when words cannot hold them... *Hear my prayer, O Lord.*

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Offering

(We are working to acquire a method of on-line giving to facilitate sending offerings and pledges. In the meantime, you may continue to support the ongoing ministry of the church by sending a check to the church office via mail to: First Baptist Church in Needham, 858 Great Plain Avenue, Needham MA 02492. Please indicate it is your offering or pledge on the check.)

Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God, all creatures here below.
Praise God above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Benediction

(Speak these words of benediction knowing that you are part of a loving community of faith. If you lit a candle at the beginning, you may wish to blow it out now.)

One: Our blessing to one another is that we are here for one another, that we are with one another, that we celebrate and remember one another along the journey.
ALL: We extinguish the Candle of Life, but the Light continues to shine within us. As we pass the peace we carry the Light of the Candle of Life from this hour into this world and beyond, offering peace, hope and light wherever the journey leads.

Passing of the Peace

(Picture in your mind's eye the faces of beloved souls with whom you would share the peace of Christ in person if you could, and offer each one your blessing of peace.)

One: The peace of Christ be with you.
ALL: And also with you.
One: Let us greet one another in peace as we prepare for the journey ahead.

Photo Attribution: Candle of Life in the Chapel and Orchids Blooming in the Hallway at FBC Needham by ©Holly C. Benzenhafer 2020. Use with permission

