

## MARCH 15, 2020 - LENT 3

### OPENING PRAYER

A Lenten Prayer for Insight:

Open our eyes, O God,  
and help us to see the gifts and talents  
in ourselves, which others can see.

Open our eyes, O God,  
and enable us to help others see the gifts and talents  
in themselves, which we can see.

Open our eyes, O God,  
and help us to see those around who are struggling,  
and give them encouragement and support.

Open our eyes, O God,  
and enable us to see those who lack life's necessities,  
and reach out to them in their discouragement and struggle.

### SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 5: 8-14

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible-and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

### MESSAGE: ON THE MATTER OF BLINDNESS

*This message has been prepared by Rev. Dr. John Ambrose for the Faith United Milton congregation on March 15, 2020. Any comments you might like to pass along after reading it could be sent to [jambro@sympatico.ca](mailto:jambro@sympatico.ca). ©Rev. Dr. John Ambrose 2020. Provided here with permission.*

Based on John 9: 1-41

Not many of us know what is it like not to be able to see, to live one's life in permanent darkness? If you were to close your eyes for a moment, and imagine yourself in a room that has many pieces of furniture and other things scattered around, and then, with eyes closed, begin walking around the room. Can you remember where things were placed? Maybe shoes were left lying on the floor, or a book, or an empty glass. These things can be dangerous when you cannot see. You may need your hands or your feet to become your eyes to check where things are. And even they cannot always help.

Our scripture passage this morning is of someone born blind. He came into the world just like any other little baby. Crying, wiggling, looking healthy, all the fingers and toes in the right place,

a wonderful head of dark feathery hair. The women who helped this little boy's mom bring him into this world quickly washed and wrapped him, and placed him in her arms. All seemed just perfect.

It was some time before she realized something was wrong. His little eyes did not move about as they should. When a hand was passed over them, they did not follow it. When something was given to him, he did not reach for it. It had to be placed in his hand. When sounds were made, he would turn his head in that direction, but it was apparent he could not see where it came from.

As he grew, his little hands would do many things for him... he would feel his mom's smooth face, or his dad's rough beard. He would rub his hands over clothing, or run food through his fingers. More and more, his hands became his eyes.

Raising a little boy who could not see was very hard for the parents and others in the family. When he started walking, they had to watch him at all times; there were so many things that could hurt him. Sometimes they had to tie him outside with a rough rope, so that he couldn't wander far, trip over a rock, fall into a water hole, or pull something heavy down on himself.

As he grew bigger and stronger and more active, his dad gave him a smooth stick so he could check what was around him as he walked. Other children didn't always understand what it was like for this young boy. They would poke him, run behind and push him, call out to him from one direction; and when he started to go that way, they would run to another place and call out...trying to confuse him. Angrily he would try to hit back with his hands or stick, but he couldn't see them. Then with angry words, or shouting and screaming, he would fight back.

In time, he realized he could not fight back when people teased or taunted him. So he began to walk away, to stay away from other children. It was very lonely for him. His family was poor, very poor. Normally, when he was old enough, he would begin to help in the home, or in the garden where food was grown, or work with his dad in the little shop. But for a blind boy in the time of Jesus, there was only one way to get money to help his family: that was to beg, to stand or walk about holding out a hand or a bowl. And that's what he did. Day after day, from the time he was about 9 years old, he was forced to help his family by begging. Each day, he would go to the same place along a road where people traveled, and beg. Some people would feel sorry for him and give him something. But many would just ignore him, or say nasty things, or push him away.

One day, as the scripture story goes, when he was a full-grown man, he was sitting along the roadside, taking a resting from begging. He could hear the voices of a few men talking and coming toward him. One voice asked a question to another: "Rabbi Jesus, how is it that this man is blind? Has he done something wrong that God would make him this way? Or have his parents done something wrong?" That's what people thought in those days. They believed if someone was blind, it was because that person had done something very wrong and was being punished by God.

The other voice answered back: "No one did wrong, neither this man nor his parents. He was just born this way. His world is darkness. But I am light; I can see; and my work, as long as I live, is to help bring light into other people's darkness." Then there was silence. The blind man could not see what was happening. Suddenly someone was right in front of him, and a gentle voice said, "I am going to put something on your eyes. It will not hurt you." To the blind man it felt like wet dirt, like mud that the man was rubbing over his eyes. He had an urge to push the man away. But the man's voice calmed him: "My son, everything is going to be alright. God, the Holy One, who loves you, is going to help you. Go now to the pool down the road, and wash away the dirt."

And off he went with his stick and bowl, down the road to the pool of water, a place where he had cooled his face many times on hot days. As he washed away the mud, something strange happened. The darkness he had known all his life was suddenly becoming brighter. He could see fuzzy things moving about in front of him. He washed his eyes some more. The fuzziness gave way to shapes, moving shapes, talking shapes. He was seeing the bodies of the talking people. He had never seen them before.

And there was the water, blue and gray and rippling. He had waded into it so many times before, but had never seen it. And in the water he saw a face, his own face, something else he had never seen before. He stood there for the longest time, just looking about at shapes, the colours, the fuzzy things high above him that he later learned were clouds. For the first time in his life, his eyes were opened and he could see. And then deep from within him burst a loud and long and happy explosion of sound...so loud it startled the crowd around him. "I can see! I can see!" he screamed over and over, his body leaping with excitement, his hands punching the air. The bowl and stick lay behind him on the ground at the pool's edge, never to be touched again.

The story should stop there; with a happy ending. But it didn't. Some people didn't like what they saw happening. Some people thought that a man who was blind was a bad person and shouldn't be helped. Some people didn't like the man, Jesus, who helped the blind man. Some believed it was all a trick. So they peppered the blind man with questions. Who did this? Were you really blind before? Where are your parents? Do they know about this? Where is the man who helped you? What did he really do?

The blind man who could now see, would not let himself be pushed around by these cruel people. He simply kept saying to them: "I used to be blind, but now I see. I don't know how it happened, but I am so happy it did. And I believe that the man who helped me is a good man." At that, the angry people shook their fists at him, turned and walk away, muttering not very nice things. Before long, Jesus, returned and spoke kind words to the man who now could see. And the day ended, but now with a happy ending.

It would be easy to delve into this story further and ask was it really a miracle? Did it really happen? Or is the story told to reach further than physical blindness...to intellectual or spiritual

blindness? There were other 'blind' people in the crowd that day, not unlike some people we know today: blind to human need, blind to bad self-behaviour, blind to a profound act of kindness, blind to a need to change one's attitude, blind to evidence that did not meet a fixed mindset. Jesus, in healing one blind person, had many close and bruising encounters with other forms of blindness. I prefer to think that John, in his gospel, told this story not to feature a startling miracle, but to help searching believers understand that following the way of Jesus can be like moving from a life too much shrouded with elements of darkness, to a life - that even in difficult times - is illuminated by light...the light of hope, of love, of a fresh start. We cannot know why it was told, but we can connect it to those times when clouds of darkness are broken by bursts of light and insight. May it be so for us.

**HYMN: Open My Eyes That I May See**

Sung by the Joslin Grove Choral Society

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDceaG7kFQA>



Open My Eyes That I May See ~ Joslin Grove Choral Society ~  
lyric video

**CLOSING PRAYER**

Dear Lord:

Your Spirit says, "Believe in ourselves, and venture out in faith.

In your strength we can take small steps, and bring change."

God invites us to persevere, and to be open to outcomes that may surprise us.

As we make this Lenten journey, God's courage and peace will be ours.

Go with God. Go with Blessings. Go with Love

Amen.