

Church at Home

for Sunday March 22, 2020

God of Love and Mercy,

As we gather in your name this day, remind us that we are not alone, that others are with us—praying together, considering your promises together, and looking toward you for hope, healing, and encouragement. Strengthen each of us as we take this time out of our Sunday to meet with you, while others we know and care about do the same. Thanks for your presence, now, with us and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that binds us together. AMEN.

The following lessons are assigned in the Universal Common Lectionary for today. As you read these verses from scripture be mindful that Christians all over the world will be reading these same passages and seeking hope with you. Ponder how the words apply to your own life today. I invite you to find a quiet place—near a window, or even outside if that works, and read out loud, to someone else, or quietly to yourself. Enjoy the nourishment of God's Word as it reads it here...

Return at some point to each passage and reflect on a question or two on your own—or together with whomever you are gathering. Then, pray—using the words on the page or your own.

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

My God makes me lie down in green pastures, leads me beside still waters, and restores my soul. My God leads me in right paths for God's name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff-- they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

Try to imagine a shepherd working with sheep. Now imagine that you are one of those sheep—unable to speak...a deep hunger, yet utterly dependent on one to lead you to food...a thirst that needs quenching...defenseless, needing protection from things that surround you, ready to attack, and break, and perhaps even

devour you. What do you need the most? To whom will you turn? How good does it feel to have and to trust, not just any shepherd, but the GOOD one? Sing or read the Psalm again—post a note on your refrigerator that says: “The LORD is my Shepherd.”

Prayer: My Shepherd, my God, Lead me now beside the still waters of peace. Remind me that you are in fact here with me now, guiding me. As our nation journeys through the dark valley of the Coronavirus pandemic help me to fear no evil, show me that you are with me; comfort me with your abundance, and guide me to the places I need to be. AMEN.

Ephesians 5:8-14

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Is there anything in your life that you have allowed to stay in the dark? If so, invite the light of Christ into that darkness right now.

Are there any unhealthy secrets that you have held onto for others from your past? Can you shine light on that today?

What does it mean to you personally to read, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”?

Prayer: God of light and life, Shine your saving light upon me in this moment. Take away the darkness of my past; the ways that others have hurt me, and the ways that I have hurt others. Shine your light on the darkness of my fears, my regrets, times when I have been unkind, and on the kindnesses that I have left undone. Renew me today. Strengthen me to awake and rise into your light to serve you and your world. AMEN.

John 9:1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus

answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 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, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 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?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 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." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 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." 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. 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." The Jews 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 sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 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." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore, his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 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." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

What do you now see that, once, was a blind spot in your life?

Are you afraid to speak up or out of your faith? Does it help to know that you are not alone in this?

Take a moment to sing or pray the words to this old hymn:

*Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
T'was blind but now I see!
T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.
Through many dangers, toils and snares
We have already come.
T'was grace that brought us safe thus far
And grace will lead us home.*

And now,
May the Lord bless you and keep you.
May God's holy, loving face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
May the God of light look upon you with favor and grant you peace!