

Lent 4, 3.22.2020

St. Mark's, Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

“Now I See”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Good morning. Today, I bring you good news of Christ's presence in a suffering world, yet I am speaking from an empty sanctuary. Just two weeks ago this sanctuary was filled with people and today it is empty. Just two weeks ago we gathered with music and prayer around God's word and sacrament. Today, most churches in this community are also empty.

We live in very unusual and extraordinary times. A global pandemic has reshaped communities across the world. We have had to learn new phrases like “social distancing” and “sheltering in place.” We have had to begin to learn new habits, working from home, going to school at home, limiting our outside travels and interactions with others.

This hasn't been and it won't be easy. It will probably become more difficult. As human beings we are created for community, to live in community, to share our gifts in community, to help others within our communities. Not being able to fully share in community is very hard. We may feel anxious; we may even feel frightened and fearful for the future. Yet today we remind ourselves that even in the darkest moments of our human journeys, God is with us. It was for this reason Christ was born: to walk with us in our suffering, to lead us out of darkness into the light of renewal and resurrection. Today we gather online to remind ourselves that we are not alone in the darkness. Light, hope and love already dwell within us. Christ dwells within us.

The good news today is that even if we cannot gather in this sanctuary, we are still the body of Christ, the church. The way we live out being the church has perhaps temporarily changed. But we can still live for one another, pray for one another, and support one another. Therefore, I encourage you to call, text, make use your technology to stay connected with one another. More than ever we need to let each other know we are remembering one another. No one should feel alone. For this reason St. Mark's has decided to continue to our Soup Kitchen Ministry every Thursday, distributing bag lunches for the hungry and homeless in our community. We are also continuing to gather groceries for the ecumenical food pantry Loaves and Fishes, so those who do not have enough to eat with know the light of Christ is in their midst and that they are not forgotten.

Today we are attempting to worship together in a new way, as Christ's body the church. The video and the sound may not be great, but that isn't the most important thing. The most important

thing is that we remember the transformative, life giving presence of Christ Jesus, the light of the world.

So it's meaningful to remember at this moment in time we are also journeying through the season of Lent, because Lent is about walking the way of the cross. The way of the cross is a way of hope because it leads us from life's darkest valleys toward hope and resurrection. The way of the cross is the way of Christ, the Good Shepherd. Today we remember, *Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we fear no evil, for Christ the Good Shepherd walks with us*. In the midst of nothing but bleak reports and bad news, we know that the light of Christ, the Good Shepherd, continues to walk with and lead us.

Paul's words from Ephesians make all this language of darkness and light very personal. Paul writes that we are already light. *"For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light."* Paul encourages us to realize that faith in God's presence transforms us into light for the world. This year, during what perhaps feels like the bleakest Lent ever, we are encouraged to see Christ's light dwelling in us, transforming us, and encouraging us to be light in the darkness for others!

Today's gospel reading is a remarkable story of healing that challenges everything we know about science and reality. Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth. Yet even the most skeptical among us know that people continue to experience healing and wellness even in the midst of life's darkest valleys of sickness and death.

After being healed, this man was repeatedly asked about who had healed him. Finally he said, *"One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see."* I was blind, now I see. Of course, these words were used in the hymn "Amazing Grace" - *"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound – that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see."*

We have all probably had moments of insight in which we have been transformed by a realization so profound that we come to see ourselves differently. We may say, "How could I have been so blind to the truth?" "How could I not have known that?" Moments of insight come to all of us because this is part of being a human being. We are not all-knowing. We each need the help and the insight of others. We are always looking for insight and new perspectives. In today's gospel Jesus tells us that this is why he came: *"I came so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."* Jesus came to give us sight – insight, the gift of seeing within ourselves.

God's amazing grace kindles a fire within us that illumines us, gives light in the midst of darkness, and offers transformative insight into ourselves and the world. What Jesus is saying is

both simple and yet profound. God's amazing grace allows us to see reality in a new way. With the gift of faith our eyes are opened to the presence of God that transforms us and give hope for the future.

During Lent, we practice the Lenten discipline of prayer, fasting and giving that rekindles our faith so that the light of Christ burns anew within us. Paul writes, "*Sleeper awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*" In a world of blind fear and dread, faith resists defeat. In a world of anxiety, faith quiets us to seek rational and workable solutions for our families, workplaces and society.

The light of Christ is already alive in you. No matter where we are, Christ is with you. No matter how you are, Christ enlightens you. No matter your physical or mental state, Christ promises light in the darkness. Christ's light empowers us in our weakness and fear. Be light that resists darkness and defeat.

We are still the church; we are a pilgrim people of hope. Live as light where you are. Together we can pray, together we can overcome the dark valley that we are journeying through. Even as we practice social distancing, sheltering in place, and whatever else it takes, be light for others. Even as you keep a safe distance, let your light shine in the distance, offering hope. Your light will illumine the whole household. Your light, even from a distance, will guide and transform the community. Resist darkness. Be the light of Christ. Be light for others. Amen