

3.15.2026 Lent 4

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

“Walk as children of light”

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

The opening of today’s verse in Ephesians reads, “*For once you were darkness, now you are light. Walk as children of light,*” and it contains three key words, darkness, light and walk. These words prepare us for today’s gospel in which a blind man is healed, given vision, and moved from darkness to light; where religious leaders have physical sight, but remain spiritually blind in darkness; yet the blind man is given the light of the world. In this story, Jesus models what Paul encourages us to be: to walk as children of light. To walk as light means *to be light* in the darkness. To walk as light is a way of living that illumines the dark valleys we walk.

Walking is how Jesus encountered people. The gospel reads, “*As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.*” Walking is crucial because it helps Jesus see people’s needs. If Jesus had ridden in a chariot, or been carried by slaves, he would have never seen the blind man. Jesus walks the paths, roads and streets.

I learned a long time ago that the best way to learn a neighborhood is to walk it. In cars or even on a bike, it’s too easy to whiz right past things and never really notice the people and the conditions of a neighborhood. When we walk, we notice that some neighborhoods are better cared for than others; that they are either safe or dangerous; that along some roads people are out and about, greeting one another; while on other roads, no one is out and no one says, “Hello.” It is crucial that Jesus walks – it is how Jesus sees people in their need.

Yesterday morning, I spent about an hour and a half walking along Scott and Kenilworth Avenues picking up trash. For the past three years, St. Mark’s Men’s Group has adopted a stretch of Scott and Kenilworth from East Boulevard down to where they merge into Park Road. You can learn a lot by walking. It amazes me what we find on the road: things that shouldn’t be on the road, nail-gun cartridges, loose nails and screws, and sharp pieces of metal and wire. We have, of course, found dead animals, loads of fast-food trash, and a vast amount of empty liquor and beer bottles (a reminder that people not only eat, but also drink and drive). Some people honk their horns at us, which I always take to be a good thing; and sometimes folks even slow down and say, “Thank you.” I like to think the work we do in simply picking up trash is incarnational ministry. It’s one way we “*walk as children of light*” in the community around our church.

In today’s gospel, as Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth and his disciples

asked a typical question that many continue to ask today, “*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*” In other words, the disciples assume that God judges people, even their children, based upon their sins. Jesus answered, “*Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.*” The disciples exhibit a common bias; a way we attempt to make sense of a broken world. Their question is about the problem of suffering: “Why do we have pain and suffering? God must be to blame.” Jesus’ answer is remarkable: God’s works will be revealed in weakness. For the man born blind, his blindness must have been a cross to bear, yet like him, in Jesus we see God’s works revealed in weakness and suffering. Jesus was crucified, not because of some sin or failure in his past, but rather, so that God’s works might be revealed in him.

There is a sense of urgency in Jesus’ language. We must work while it is light, while there is time. Each have been given work by God to do during our lifetime. Each of us have been given a cross to carry while we have time. What is your work and do you have a sense of urgency? Jesus worked with urgency and purpose. After applying the mud compound to the blind man’s eyes, he told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. By simply doing what Jesus asks, the blind man already reveals hope and even faith.

Yet when the blind man returns healed, rather than being met with joy, he is met with questions: “*Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?*” “*How were your eyes opened?*” Starting with the neighbors, and then with the religious leaders, people struggle to see the presence of God’s light at work in suffering.

There is good reason why the psalm for today is Psalm 23. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He knows our suffering and walks along side of us in our need. He restores us and walks with us through life’s darkest valleys. Yet this cannot be said for the religious leaders in this story. Not only do they appear very “un-shepherd” like, but they also show an utter lack of faith that God can heal. They have already decided that Jesus is a sinner because he has healed a man on the Sabbath. In contrast, Jesus reveals that God heals and restores even on the Sabbath.

We continue to see this kind of behavior in our world. People don’t like some group or some person and look for ways to justify their hatred – even if it means dragging God into it to be judge and jury over them. The religious leaders in the story are blind to God working in their midst. In the end, they drive the man out of the synagogue onto the margins of community. Shunned from his community, the healed man is now alone in a new kind of darkness.

It is here that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, returns to seek out the lost sheep. The man doesn’t recognize Jesus because, of course, he has never seen him, yet he knows Jesus’ voice. Like this man, none of us have seen Jesus, but you know his voice. You know his works in your life,

because he has come to you in your suffering. Like this man, God has given you hope and strength so that you might also say, “*I believe.*”

This congregation does a lot of good work. The Soup Kitchen, Room in the Inn, the Men’s Group emergency food pantry – even our community street cleaning. We are a church trying to walk amid the suffering we see in this world. One night last month I sat across the dinner table from a homeless man at Room in the Inn. The man said to me, “Imagine what the world would be like without churches like this. You see our need and offer help.” So, in that spirit:

Imagine with me a world that does not see suffering. Imagine with me a world that is blind to others in their suffering. Imagine with me a world that drives people out, rejecting and shunning them because they are seen as sinful and unclean. Imagine a world of darkness in which people don’t stop to care for one another. Imagine a world where we always drive by intent on “the next thing” – a world where we discard fellow human beings as if we were throwing trash out the window of the car.

Yet Jesus the Good Shepherd, walks the streets. He is among us in this room today; he has been with you in every dark valley; and he stands before you in your neighbor in need.

In a moment, as you confess the Apostles’ Creed, you will say, “I believe.” These are the same words that the healed man said to Jesus, “*I believe.*” To say these words is to confess our belief that we have seen and heard Jesus walking and speaking in our lives. To say, “I believe” is to confess that Jesus has worked in your suffering for a purpose – to reveal God’s power in your weakness.

We continue to live in a world where the weak are called “losers,” and where we are told from childhood, “only the strong survive.” During Lent, we look to the cross for a reason – it is the only place we see God’s strength revealed in human weakness.

Christ lives in you to strengthen you. He is the light of the world. *For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light.* You are light because he lives in you.

Overcoming the world’s darkness begins within you.

Walk as children of light.

Be light for others. Amen.