

A Service of Morning Prayer
for the Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 22nd, 2020

The church has always taught that in our common prayer we are united with one another, and with the church in all times and places. As we are prevented from coming together physically, you are invited to enter into this time of prayer, knowing that we are united in spirit as we pray this together.

You may light a candle at the beginning of prayer.

THE GATHERING OF THE COMMUNITY

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. **And also with you.**

Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. **God's mercy endures for ever.**

A PRAYER OF LAMENT (FROM PSALM 10):

Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?

Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor—

Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression.

Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;

and the vulnerable fall by their might.

Rise up, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand;

do not forget the oppressed.

O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek;

you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear

to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed,

so that the powers of this world may strike terror no more.

THE TRISAGION (TO BE SAID OR SUNG THREE TIMES):

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One,
have mercy upon us.

A COLLECT FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT:

Holy God,

in Jesus Christ you reveal yourself to the world,
even when we are blind to your grace.

Open our eyes to see your transforming love in our midst,
so that we may see your world anew;

through Jesus Christ, the saviour who shows compassion. Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Here follow the psalm and two of the appointed lections for this Sunday. You are invited to read them through prayerfully, and meditate on the questions which follow.

PSALM 23

The Lord is my shepherd; *
I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures *
and leads me beside still waters.
He revives my soul *
and guides me along right pathways for his name's sake.
Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall fear no evil; *
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; *
you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over.
Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, *
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

*This is of course a very familiar passage of Scripture.
How does it speak to you in these times of anxiety and hardship?
Are there phrases which stand out for you, speak to you in a new way?
Explore them by offering them in prayer.*

THE EPISTLE: 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.'

*The epistle talks about hidden things being exposed by the light.
What has the current crisis brought to light, that may have been hidden before?
What have we learned about ourselves, our society, our institutions?
What might it mean to live as children of light in these days?*

THE GOSPEL: JOHN 9:1-11 (ABBREVIATED):

As Jesus 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 neighbours 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.'

With their question, "Who sinned?" the disciples show that all too human tendency to look for someone to blame when things go wrong. Can we recognize in ourselves this tendency, when we are feeling anxious, to respond with blame? If we recognize it, can we put it to rest?

Jesus answers that he was born blind "so that God's works might be revealed in him". When bad things happen, how can God use them for good? Where have you seen God in the events of the past week?

The neighbours are slow to recognize in this joyful, liberated man the blind beggar they passed every day. We get used to seeing people a certain way, and find it hard to change our perspective. Can you think of people you may know, where you have been blind to their potential?

WE RESPOND TO THE WORD

A CREED (FROM THE CELTIC EUCHARIST FOR LENT):

We believe in God above us, Maker and Sustainer of all life,
of sun and moon, of water and earth, of male and female.

We believe in God beside us, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,
born of a woman's womb, servant of the poor.
He was tortured and nailed to a tree. A man of sorrows, he died forsaken.
He descended into the earth to the place of death.
On the third day he rose from the tomb.
He ascended into heaven to be everywhere present,
and his Kingdom will come on earth.

We believe in God within us, the Holy Spirit of Pentecostal fire,
life-giving breath of the church, Spirit of healing and forgiveness,
source of resurrection and of life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray, in these anxious and challenging times, for one another and for those in danger:

For the vulnerable and immunocompromised, who are at particular risk: **Lord have mercy.**

For nurses, doctors, and all healthcare workers, who put themselves at risk to protect others:
Lord have mercy.

For custodians and cleaners; for police; for supermarket workers, truck drivers, food bank volunteers, and farmers, who keep us fed and cared for: **Lord have mercy.**

For those in authority, as they try to make the best decisions for the common good: **Lord**

have mercy.

For those who feel isolated, anxious, or afraid; for those with mental health challenges: **Lord have mercy.**

For those who are sick; for those sick with the virus, and for those with other issues who may not be receiving the care they need: **Lord have mercy.**

For businesses struggling to keep afloat, and to keep their workers employed: **Lord have mercy.**

For the poor and marginalized, the homeless and the hungry, here and abroad, who will be disproportionately affected by this disease: **Lord have mercy.**

For all our loved ones, that they may rest secure in God's hands: **Lord have mercy.**

A PRAYER FOR USE DURING A TIME OF PANDEMIC

Loving God, whose peace passes all our understanding;
as we face this present pandemic, and experience fear and anxiety,
may we hear your voice, bringing calm to the storms of our time.
Strengthen those who work to limit the spread of infection,
and those who seek to care for the sick,
and keep us mindful of those most vulnerable.
May we shape our living to protect one another,
and may our changing habits, practices and sacrifices,
be for the greater love of our community and all your people. Amen.

BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

In place of a blessing, hear these words of encouragement from Bishop Stephen Charleston:

Now is the time for which our faith has prepared us. Now is the moment when all that we believe can be put to work. Now we can turn to the inner resources we have been developing over these many years to face the challenge of a world in desperate need. We are not afraid of this crisis for we have been made ready for it. We have devoted our lives to the belief that something greater than fear or disease guides human history. We have studied, prayed and grown in the Spirit. Now we come to the call to use what we believe. Our people need hope, confidence, courage and compassion: the very things for which we have been trained. We are the calm in the midst of a storm. Stand your ground and let your light so shine that others may see it and find their faith as well.

Glory to God, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever. Amen.