

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.’

John 9:1-12

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 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.’

Dear siblings in Christ, Grace and peace to you from God our Creator and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

“Who sinned, Jesus?”

This is the first question the disciples ask their teacher upon coming across a man who was born blind.

“Who sinned, Jesus? This man, or his parents?”

In other words, “whose fault is it that this person is blind? Who is to blame?”

What a terrible question to ask.

So often, when we are presented with new or unsettling situations, we, like the disciples, rush to bad questions. We rush to blame. We carve up the family of God between “who is guilty?” and “who is innocent?” And, usually, the people asking this question of blame have already presumed themselves innocent.

As *we* face a global pandemic, my friends, perhaps you, like me, feel scared. Perhaps you are deeply worried about where this is heading, about how long this forced isolation from each other will go on.

I don't know how, or when, we will get through this...but I know that we will. And, as we get through it, we will learn one of two things from this experience being felt on a global scale:

We could learn from this that we are (and have always been) deeply connected to one another. We will learn again what we have confessed for so long, “We are one body.” The health and well-being of my neighbor has a direct impact on my own health and well-being, and vice versa. This is the first thing we could learn.

But the other thing we could learn is how to draw the lines between us even deeper, even uglier, even meaner. We might rush to blame, and to easy explanations. We will think of some as innocent victims, and others as the threat.

Which, of course, would be not only a spiritual crisis but it would only deepen the health crisis before us. Blame and shame have never brought the truth into the light. If we make those who are struggling feel shame, perhaps they won't admit they are sick...and the cycle continues.

This coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, is not a China virus. Or an Italy virus. Or an American virus. It is a virus that comes for us all because we are human: it doesn't care about nationality, or racial identity, or economic status, or political party, or age. The knowledge and pain of this experience will either draw us together, or it will separate us even further.

I hope we will learn the first thing. It is, after all, the way of Jesus. After hearing this bad question – who sinned? – Jesus dismisses it out of hand: ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ Jesus answers. “He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.”

And then he does an odd thing. I’m sure it struck you as you heard the gospel, as we are all on high germ alert these days: Jesus spits on the ground and mixes his spit with the dirt. He then takes the spit mud and rubs it on the blind man’s eyes.

It’s difficult explaining what’s happening in our world to a three-year-old. Perhaps some of you have had a similar experience these past few days.

It's difficult to explain why we're not going to school, why we're not going to church, why we're not getting together with friends. It's hard to explain about these invisible little things called germs – and some germs are good and some are bad, but there's *one* right now that's really bad and so we need to all stay inside for a while.

Yesterday, my three-year-old and I, in an attempt to fight off some of our cabin fever, put on our boots and headed into the field behind our house. And she immediately took off running, playing all kinds of games she invented on the spot.

But then she arrived at a two-foot by two-foot patch of mud in the grass, and immediately her whole reason for being was focused on *that mud*. And she stomped around in it in her boots and jumped and giggled with delight. “This is my mud pile,” she declared, very matter-of-factly.

There's something about mud. Something about things that are *real*, that are *earthy*, that are even *dirty*. We know on some level that to be human means to be connected to our bodies, to one another, and to the earth.

Jesus, after all, uses mud made from *spit* to heal a person! Our faith is energized and deepened when we receive human touch and connection, when we are in nature, when we give comfort to another, when we hear music, when we serve someone in need, hand-to-hand.

And this is why this particular way of being – each confined to our own homes – is so hard right now. Remaining in place *is* the most faithful thing we can be doing. But it is also uprooting us from the real relationships, the real stuff of the world that makes our faith feel most alive.

We need each other. And maybe we have taken this for granted for too long.

But remember what Jesus says about the man who gets his spit and mud treatment: “He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.”

In other words, the blindness is not the problem. Instead, the problem is the prejudices, the faithlessness, and the judgments of others that this man’s blindness reveals.

So what will this coronavirus reveal about us? How might the works of God show up even in this time of fear and distress and isolation?

One of the works of God I’ve witnessed in the past days has been the Christ the King foundation fast-tracking a grant of \$5,000 which will be matched and given immediately to Ralph Reeder food shelf. Another would be simply the circles and small groups continuing to pray for one another through email, refusing to let this forced isolation keep them from checking in and offering prayer for each other.

I received an email this week from a member who shared a poem that has since gone viral (digitally speaking). It is written by a Franciscan friar from Ireland, and I want to close my sermon today by reading it to you. Because it gives me hope. It helped me to *see* with new eyes the works of God that have already begun to spring up all around us.

But before I read it, I want to say simply: I miss you, church. It’s hard not being together. I think of you in isolation, in fear, and grieving so many things you’ve needed to give up, and it’s enough to make me weep. We’re in this together, and you are in my prayers...that the peace of God may surround you, and that the works of God might reveal themselves to you wherever you are.

This is “Lockdown” by Fr. Richard Hendrick:

“Lockdown”

Yes there is fear.

Yes there is isolation.

Yes there is panic buying.

Yes there is sickness.

Yes there is even death.

But,

They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise

You can hear the birds again.

They say that after just a few weeks of quiet

The sky is no longer thick with fumes

But blue and grey and clear.

They say that in the streets of Assisi

People are singing to each other

across the empty squares,

keeping their windows open

so that those who are alone

may hear the sounds of family around them.

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland

Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.

Today a young woman I know

is busy spreading fliers with her number

through the neighborhood

So that the elders may have someone to call on.

Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples

are preparing to welcome

and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary

All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting

All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way

All over the world people are waking up to a new reality

To how big we really are.

To how little control we really have.

To what really matters.

To Love.

So we pray and we remember that
Yes there is fear.
But there does not have to be hate.
Yes there is isolation.
But there does not have to be loneliness.
Yes there is panic buying.
But there does not have to be meanness.
Yes there is sickness.
But there does not have to be disease of the soul
Yes there is even death.
But there can always be a rebirth of love.
Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.
Today, breathe.
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic
The birds are singing again
The sky is clearing,
Spring is coming,
And we are always encompassed by Love.
Open the windows of your soul
And though you may not be able
to touch across the empty square,
Sing.

Amen.