

## A Meditation for Mar 19/23, 'the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent' – pg. 1

*By the Rev. Warren Ball of Mt. Albert United Church*

Hello and welcome to this meditation! Today, the lectionary, that biblical guide that I was trained to use in seminary, directs us to the Gospel of John for the third of four times in this particular season of the Christian calendar. Today's trip into John features the story of when Jesus healed a man who was born blind. What a great opportunity to think about how we might actually be called to become blind in Lent! Well, let's begin our today's spiritual journey by turning to God in prayer:

**Discerner of all:**

**touch our blindness in this time,  
help us to view life through your truth,  
and help us to see with Jesus' compassion!  
For the sake of your kin-dom  
this we humbly pray, amen.**

Today's Scripture reading: *from* John 9:1-41 'The Healing of the Blind Man' (NRSV)

As he walked along, Jesus saw a man who had been born blind. His disciples asked, "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." After Jesus said this, he spat on the ground, made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes. Then Jesus told the man, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." So, the man born blind went, and washed, and came back able to see! The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar asked, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "Yes, it is he." But others said, "No, but it is someone like him." Meanwhile the man himself kept saying, "I am that man!"

Then the people brought the man who had formerly been blind to the religious leaders, the Pharisees. Now it happened to be a Sabbath day when Jesus performed this miracle, so some of the Pharisees said, "Jesus cannot be from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such good things?" And they were divided ... So, for a second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God, for we know that Jesus is a sinner!" The man born blind answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner or not! One thing I do know is that, though I was blind, now I see." And the Pharisees drove the man born blind out of town.

When Jesus heard what had happened to the healed man, he went to find him, saying, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man born blind answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You are speaking with him right now!" And then the man born blind worshiped Jesus, who said, "I

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came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”

### **“Becoming Blind”**

*Mix now, O God, a paste of your love, and place that paste upon our eyes. Then let us wash in the pool of your grace. Enable us to see that we may better become your love in this world, amen.*

Today’s gospel reading unfolds like a drama, a drama with three separate scenes. (Isn’t it almost like a reading from Luke?) In the first scene, Jesus meets, and cures, a man who had been born blind. Now let’s remember that, in the understanding of that time and place, every human illness, including every birth defect, was seen as the result of sin. It might have been caused by the person’s own sin. It might have been caused by the sin of their parents. What a horribly cruel way of thinking about God, is it not? Well, going straight against those understandings, Jesus says that this man born blind was not to blame for his limitation, and restores his sight!

That’s when things start to heat up because the second scene features the consequences of that healing. And this scene takes us right into the very nature of human doubt because a number of people don’t believe it’s the same man. “Oh, sure,” they say, “he looks like the same guy, but he’s not!” Oh, we love our doubts, don’t we? You see, doubt takes away our responsibility. And there’s also criticism because some say, “Even if Jesus did heal that man, he shouldn’t have done that on the Sabbath!” Of course, the blind man can’t understand that, and simply says, “You people in that church like to talk about seeing God, but you sure couldn’t help me to see – only Jesus did that!” Well, that’s more truth than some are able to handle, and they drive him out of church!

All of which brings us to the third scene. Jesus is back in this one, speaking with the man born blind. “Do you believe in me?” Jesus asks. “Oh, I sure do!” the man replies. Then comes Jesus’ unforgettable response: “I came so that the blind may see and those who see may become blind.” And isn’t that what precisely what Lent is all about – becoming blind? Blind to all the things that would limit our understanding? Blind to all the things that prevent us from stretching and growing; trying and learning? Blind to the selfishness that undermines reconciliation – that undermines working for right relations with First Nation communities all across this land? Blind to all the things that blur the gospel truth that God loves us, and that God’s love WILL enable us to do whatever needs to be done? But this is where we have to remember something really, really important. How important? As important as anything can be, that’s how important! You see, as the American humourist, Will Rogers, once put it, “Even if we’re on the right path in life, we can still get run over IF we’re sitting still!” When God enables us to see, we can’t rest on that miracle. No, no, no; we have to, we simply have to, act!

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If ever there was a person to provide genuine, living proof that such ideas can become as solid for you and I as the ground upon which we stand, surely it was Helen Keller. Just imagine the incredible difficulty of learning how to communicate and function in this world without being able to see or hear. Just imagine the frustration, the irritation, the horrible sense of being damaged. Just imagine the whole world of inconvenience and hardship. Just imagine the shame and the desperate anger of 'why me? Yet out of Helen Keller' desperate struggle, the struggle that I can't even really imagine, out of that inability to see and that inability to hear, Helen Keller saw and heard these profound pieces of wisdom. The following statements were all written by Helen:

- When one door of happiness closes in life, another opens. But, often, we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.
- All the world is full of suffering. It is also full of overcoming.
- Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.
- Death is no more than passing from one room into another. But there's a difference for me, you know. Because in that other room I shall be able to see.
- I am only one but still I am one. I cannot do everything but still I can do something. Because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can.
- What I am really looking for in life is not 'out there' – it's in me!

Well, God has placed the very same love inside you and me that was at the heartbeat of Helen Keller's sweeping accomplishments. And that same love will heal us of all that blinds us, of all that stops us from hearing what we need to hear. That same love will teach us what we need to learn. That same love will lead us through this year's Lenten journey so that we're truly ready for Easter.

Amen? Oh, yes; amen!

Come, let us turn back to God now in prayer; come, let us pray:

God of Lent, so many shadows haunt the worlds in which we live. We speak of peace even while we find new ways to cause pain and suffering. We give lip service to the virtues of tolerance even as we continue to build walls at every turn. If we had to depend on human resources alone, God, how could we do anything but despair of the future! But your love would touch our blindness this morning and enable us to embrace the future with hope for it is yours!

Forgive us, God, when we have strayed from our Lenten path. Instead, may the integrity of your love sweep through our shoddy track records, bringing our future plans into line with your will.

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We pray that this year’s Lenten journey may bring a return to the covenant in which we love you, God, and our neighbours as Jesus taught us to. We pray that this year’s Lenten journey may be a time for truth, justice, and peace in human affairs. We pray that this year’s Lenten journey may be a time for each family to strengthen bonds of love and communication.

We pray now for all who are facing difficulty this day and we pray, too, for all the places where there’s difficulty. We especially pray once again for the people of Ukraine, that peace come and that justice may be brought to bear!

From within our church family, O God, we continue to pray for the Kelly family, that everyone may be strengthened as Dave’s treatments for throat cancer eventually enable him to live cancer-free. And, with the death this last week of Wayne Kett, we pray for Pat, and their family, that they may all find your comfort and assurance. We pray, too, for Betty Sanders, that her surgery for heart blockages may prove to be completely effective, even as she resumes all of her activities.

In the silence of the next moments, O God, receive the deep burdens that our spirits bear today: *moment of silence*.

All that I have named with my words, all that lies yet too deep for words to touch, we bring to you, God, as we take those words that Jesus once taught us and pray together VU959, a modern choral version of Christ’s Prayer:

**Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your name.**

**Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil,**

**for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever.**

May it be so, God – amen!

Completely of our blindness, let us return to the world, so that we may live God’s love into creation, and better take up our role in the unfolding miracle of God’s life! Amen.