**Zion Lutheran Church Mission Statement**

**“*Bonded in Christ’s love, we teach, preach, and equip God’s people for discipleship here and throughout the world.”***

**Fourth Sunday in Lent March 22, 2020**

**Prayer Discipline -- Not Understanding Our New-Birth Right**
We need to overcome our guilt and shame.

God loves us with a perfect and unchanging love, and longs for us to come to him, to ask of him, to test and affirm his great and precious promises.

God knows us intimately—our thoughts, our motives, our guilt, our shame; and God has made provision in Christ so that we can approach him regardless of our perceived condition.

Hebrews 4:9-15 reveals a God who invites to abandon our efforts of self- righteousness and sin management—and enter into his rest.

God will search us with God’s word (not always comfortable process as we know) and reveal to us our true spiritual condition.

God reminds us that regardless of our spiritual condition that we have a sympathetic High Priest eternally lives to intercede for those he redeemed.

God invites into his presence, into an environment of grace and mercy.

God’s invitation to come boldly confirms that there is nothing that need keep us from prayer except our lack of understanding our spiritual new-birth right.

**Gathering**
Baptism is sometimes called enlightenment.

The gospel for this Sunday is the story of the man born blind healed by Christ.

“I was blind, now I see,” declares the man. In baptism, God opens our eyes to see the truth of who we are: God’s beloved children.  As David was anointed king of Israel, in baptism God anoints our head with oil, and calls us to bear witness to the light of Christ in our daily lives.

**Confession and Forgiveness**
Blessed be the Holy Trinity, **+** one God, who is present, who gives life,
who calls into existence the things that do not exist. Amen

If you were to keep watch over sins, Lord, who could stand? *Silence is kept for reflection.*

Gracious God, have mercy on us.

We confess that we have turned away from you, knowingly and unknowingly. We have wandered from your resurrection life. We have strayed from your love for all people. Turn us back to you, O God. Give us ne hearts and right spirits, that we may find what is pleasing to you and dwell in your house forever. Amen.

Receive good news: God turns to you in love, “I will put my Spirit in you, and you shall live,” says our God. All your sin is forgiven in the name of + Jesus Christ, who is the free gift of God’s grace for you. Amen The peace of the Lord be with you all. And also with you.

**Readings**

**1st Samuel 16:1-13**  Lector – Samuel anointed David even though he is the youngest of Jesse’s eight sons and did not match his brothers in height or other physical characteristics. With anointing came the endowment of the Spirit of the Lord, designating David as the Lord’s chosen successor to Saul.

The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the Lord said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, “I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.” Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, “Do you come peaceably?” He said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.” But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.”

Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah. Here ends this reading.

**Psalm 23 - The Divine Shepherd**
The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
   He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
   he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
   for his name’s sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
   I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
   your rod and your staff—
   they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
   in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
   my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall pursue me
   all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
   my whole life long.

## **Ephesians 5:8-14** Lector – Because we now live in God’s light which is Jesus Christ, we conduct our lives in ways that reflect the light of Christ, so that our deeds and words are pleasing to God. Paul writes:

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.” Here ends this reading.

**Prayer of the Day**
Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us in our homes.

By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into darkness of our hearts, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen

**Gospel – John 9:1-41** P- Jesus heals a man born blind, provoking a hostile reaction that he regards as spiritual blindness to the things of God.

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.”

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”

His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.

Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshipped him. Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see’, your sin remains.” The Gospel of the Lord.

**Message**

Imagine you are born blind…which is hard for someone who has sight…but try all the same.

If you were born blind…

…you could feel the warmth of the sun on your face, but never see the beauty of a sunset.

If you were born blind… …you could inhale the aroma of the garden, but words like red, yellow, purple and green are meaningless to you.

If you were born blind... you could hear the discovery and delight in child’s voice, but never see it expressed on the child’s face.

Grace and peace to you from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

***Stuff happens…and life and illness is unpredictable!***

A woman dies of lung cancer…stuff happens!

Her family ***IS*** always quick to point that out, unlike most lung cancer victims, she never smoked cigarettes in her life.

They do not want people to blame her for her illness.

It is comforting…to find some reason…when people are afflicted with a disease.

But not all people who smoke get lung cancer, and not everyone with lung cancer smoked.

Why do people so often want to play the “blame game”?

I mean, people like to find a reason to place blame on someone or anyone!

We may want to play the “blame game” in our current global situation with the pandemic Coronavirus.

We may ask:

* Where did it start?
* Who started it?
* How did it get here?

But it is here…as close as Lincoln…and placing blame is of no benefit or help to anyone.

It is what we do now that truly benefits other people.

It started in New York, two twenty someone’s started “Invisible Hands” a volunteer group that shops for older, at-risk residents and then delivers so that the older, at-risk person doesn’t have to.

When the “Invisible Hands” volunteer drops off the groceries or the prescriptions…they place it at the door…ring the bell…and stepp back 6 feet.

One volunteer said after he delivered groceries to an older at-risk woman, she invited him in for cookies and tea.

He declined her offer…but they agreed he would come back to have cookies and tea when the threat of the Coronavirus is no more.

This volunteer group in NYC has grown from two twenty somethings to 5,000 volunteers in the same time the Coronavirus has been active in NYC.

“Invisible Hands” is spreading throughout our nation and now around the world, everywhere the Coronavirus has appeared.

It is amazing how people respond in desperate and dangerous situations…they do the ***right thing***!

They do and act as God wants them to!

But today in the gospel, Jesus’ disciples aren’t doing the ***right thing***…they play the “blame game” with the man born blind.

They ask Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

They seek to place the blame on someone…someone sinned…and sinned bad enough that God made this man blind at birth.

So, maybe the basic human instinct is to place blame, somebody sinned, ***that’s why God is punishing the man born blind.***

In saying this, the disciples reveal that they see God as a mean God…not a loving God.

A God just waiting for someone to mess up in sin…so God can the punish man or his parents.

God is ***“spare the rod and spoil the sinner”*** type of God.

A God without mercy or forgiveness or love for creatures of creation.

They ask Jesus, “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.”

Doing the ***“right thing”*** isallowing God’s works to be revealed in you, and me.

As in the volunteers who staff doctor’s offices, hospitals, pharmacies, grocery stores, gas stations. ambulance and police departments, and now volunteers like “Invisible Hands” who bridge the gap to provide the essentials to the most at-risk people around us…***pray for these people.***

Check on your neighbors, use the gift of social media it can be…go to the window and wave to those inside... ***pray for these people.***

Be the best you can be in Jesus’ name! Amen

**Apostles’ Creed**

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
 maker of heaven and earth;**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
 born of the Virgin Mary,
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.
 On the third day he rose again;
 he ascended into heaven,
 he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
….and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the holy catholic church,
 the communion of saints,
 the forgiveness of sins,
 the resurrection of the body,
 and the life everlasting. Amen.**

**Prayers of the Church**

Let us lift our hearts and voices to the Lord in prayer, that he would be merciful to his people.

*A brief silence*

Holy God, lead us, even when eyes fail and earthly lights grow dim, to his kindly light, which no darkness can overcome. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heal the blindness from which we, the members of this congregation, suffer. Give us new eyes to see Jesus in one another, and for his sake, to love even the person we don’t yet like. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give us eyes to see new opportunities for serving you; for sharing our faith in you; and for making this church a lamp that shines with the light of Christ’s love for everyone we encounter.

We ask for strength and compassion during this Coronavirus outbreak. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heal the blindness of those who persecute followers of Jesus, and of all who turn a blind eye to their plight. Grant that all who suffer on account of Christ may be so faith-filled and gracious that their tormentors turn to you for healing, forgiveness, and new life. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Let your healing, blessing and grace rest upon the blind and deaf; and upon those with impaired or distorted senses of touch or taste, balance or movement. Give them strength and courage. Surround them with people whose respect and encouragement leads them to greater faith in you, their light and their life.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heal the blindness of the nations, and all who are in positions of authority. Give them eyes to seek your will, and hearts and hands to do it. Give them eyes to see injustice, deceit and cruelty, and the strength and courage to combat them. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

As your dear Son healed the man born blind, we pray that he would also bring healing, light, hope, and renewed faith to everyone who suffers from any affliction.

Especially we lift up the needs of:

* Illness and disease of all kinds including cold and flu along with the Coronavirus,
* Cancer patients

Lift them up from their pain, sorrow, fear or grief. And give them the joy of your saving help, now and always. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We thank you for receiving into your greater light and into your eternal life, everyone who died trusting your promises. Deal mercifully with those shadowed by grief and loss. And we beg you: Lord, let us receive our sight, so that day by day, we see you more clearly; love you more dearly; and follow you more nearly. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, gracious Father, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**.

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy Name,
 thy kingdom come,
 thy will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those
 who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
 and the power, and the glory,
 forever and ever. Amen.**

**Blessing & Dismissal** P- Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day if salvation. May God + bless you, unbind you, and send you in love and peace.. **C- Amen.** P- Go in peace. Share the Good News! **C- Thanks be to God.**