**Weekend of Sunday, March 19, 2022**

**4th Sunday in Lent/Year A**

**First Reading:**

**Second Reading:**

**Gospel Reading: John 9:1-41**

***“Faith, Perseverance, and the Power of God”***

**Theme:**

*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.*

**Texts:**

**First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13**

*Samuel anointed David even though he was the eighth-oldest son of Jesse and did not match his brothers in height or other physical characteristics. With the anointing came endowment with the Spirit of the Lord, designating David as the Lord’s chosen successor to Saul.*

1The 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.” 2Samuel 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.’ 3Invite 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.” 4Samuel 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?” 5He 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.
 6When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.” 7But 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.” 8Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” 9Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” 10Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” 11Samuel 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.” 12He 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.” 13Then 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.

**Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14**

*Because we now live in the divine light which is Jesus Christ, we conduct our lives in ways that reflect the light of Christ, so that our activity is truly pleasing to God.*

8Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—9for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,
 “Sleeper, awake!
  Rise from the dead,
 and Christ will shine on you.”

**Gospel: John 9:1-41**

*Jesus heals a man born blind, provoking a hostile reaction that he regards as spiritual blindness to the things of God.*

1As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Though the entire book of Job denies this, llness and disability were sometimes attributed to sin 3Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. The sages long believed that only the Messiah (the “sent” one of the Father) could heal a man born blind. 4We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” This verse indicates that Jesus is viewing the man’s blindness and later the restoration of his sight as symbolic of the spiritual journey from darkness to light, from unbelief to belief.6When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, 7saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Indicating that Jesus was the "sent one" This pool was at the southern approach to the Temple Mount, inside the city walls, in the city of David. It is believed that the waters of Siloam were used to anoint the Kings of Judah and it became associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8The 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?” 9Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” 10But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” 11He 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.” 12They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”
 13They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15Then 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.” 16Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” Picture of the shabat elevator. But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. 17So 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.”
 18The 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 19and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” 20His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21but 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.” 22His 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. 23Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”
 24So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! do not credit Jesus with the healing We know that this man is a sinner.” 25He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” 26They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” 27He 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?” 28Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” 30The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. The sages long believed that only the Messiah (the “sent” one of the Father) could heal a man born blind. 33If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” 34They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” *Born entirely in sins* likely refers back to v. 2 and the common belief that congenital blindness is somehow related to the sin of the man or his parents, a view that Jesus

rejects (vv. 3–4). And they drove him out. Why drive him out? What did he do?
 35Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” 36He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” 37Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” 38He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. 39Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” 40Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” 41Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

**Sermon**

All three of our readings for today have something to do with anointing, or *setting apart*, which was the purpose of anointing.

In the First Reading from First Samuel, the prophet Samuel anointed David, son of Jesse, to be king over Israel.

In the Gospel Reading, in which we will spend more time in a few moments, Jesus sent the blind man to the Pool of Siloam to wash. In the Old Testament, the waters of Siloam were used to anoint the kings of Judah. And, as John included, not by accident, Siloam means "sent" indicating that Jesus was the "sent one."

And in the Second Reading, the apostle Paul reminds his readers that we were anointed at baptism to be "children of light," and then encourages us to "live as children of light," a new standard of living that he describes as "good and right and true."

Now let's take a deeper look at the Gospel Reading.

Pic

The story takes place at a historical site in Jerusalem, the Pool of Siloam. Like many of the sites we read about in the Bible, the Pool of Siloam was lost to antiquity until 2004 when it was accidentally discovered during repairs to a drainage system. Pic The Pool of Siloam, which is inside the city walls, was fed by the Spring of Gihon, which is outside the city walls, through King Hezekiah's tunnel. Hezekiah's Tunnel was dug through the clay and limestone rock under the city of Jerusalem during his reign, 715-686 BCE. Hezekiah saw the tunnel as a lifeline as the Assyrian army threatened to invade. The 1750 feet long tunnel was dug by hand, starting at both ends and working toward the middle following a natural fissure in the mountain, guiding the tunnel diggers by tapping on the rock above. This took great *perseverance* but the project was a matter of life and death.

By the way, the Spring of Gihon was where David's son, Solomon was anointed. So the Spring of Gihon, Hezekiah's Tunnel that delivers the water to the Pool of Siloam, and the Pool of Siloam have great significance in the story.

In this reading, a man born blind was healed by Jesus. Although there are cases today of surgeons restoring sight to people born blind, there was no such procedure in the first century. A blind person was simply relegated to a life of begging to provide for themselves.

There is another important aspect of this story that is alluded to by Jesus's disciples. 2His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” They fell into the trap of the conventional wisdom of the day which was that one got what one deserved in life. In this man's case, he was born blind, therefore either he or his parents must have done something to deserve it! The Old Testament Book of Job discredits this conventional wisdom, but that obviously didn't stick in the first century. 3Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him." You see, another bit of conventional wisdom indicated that only the Messiah (the “sent” one of the Father) could heal a man born blind. And so Jesus used the situation as a teachable moment for his disciples. So, "he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, 7saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” The blind man did as he was told *in faith* and sure enough, he was healed! That could have been the end of the story, but it wasn't.

Even today, unless there is some anatomical condition preventing vision that can be corrected by surgery, a person born blind doesn't just doesn't get their sight! So I can imagine that in the first century, the man's miracle caused quite a stir, and to make sense of it, the people got the Pharisees involved.

The Pharisees interrogated the man – what did he do? Notice he didn't ask to be given his sight. I am sure he would have had he known who Jesus was. And notice Jesus didn't ask the man if he could restore his sight! Restoration and wholeness are simply hallmarks of God's Messiah!

In this reading, everybody could have learned a lesson if they chose to get by their own biases. Perhaps the same is true for us as hearers.

This story teaches us several important lessons about

* faith,
* perseverance,
* the power of God to work in our lives,
* and the importance of having a true and genuine faith.

Let's talk about each of these lessons independently:

First, *the importance of perseverance*. Even though the blind man was born into a difficult situation, he did not let it defeat him. He did what he could do about his situation. Sadly, in the first century, all he could do was beg. Begging was culturally acceptable then. We can learn from this beggar's example that no matter what challenges we may face in life, we should have faith. We should continue to trust in God and have faith that God's desire for our wholeness will work in our lives. Today, the Spirit enables scientists to discover new techniques and medicines, medical doctors to treat people, and social services like our own Food Distribution to help people in need. Nevertheless, we are to persevere! Never lose faith!

Another important lesson we can learn from this story is t*o acknowledge and utilize the power of God to work in our lives*. The blind man was healed by Jesus through a simple act of faith. It seems obvious to me that he didn't know who Jesus was but he allowed a stranger to put mud on his face and then followed the stranger's instructions.

Remember the story of Naaman the Syrian from Second Kings who sought out Elisha the prophet for healing of his leprosy? Elisha told him to go wash in the Jordan River seven times, and he refused! Naaman's own servants said*,* 2 Kings 5:13"Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he did as Elisha told him, and as a result, Naaman got the healing he sought and declared, 5:15"Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel."

In today's Gospel Reading, we see that even though the man was born blind, God in Christ was still able to work in his life and change his circumstances. This is a powerful reminder that no matter what challenges we may face, we should never doubt the power of God to work in our lives and follow the Spirit's leading.

Finally, we can learn from this *story the importance of having a true and genuine faith*. The Pharisees in the story were more concerned with maintaining their own power and status than in trying to understand and know who they were dealing with.

On the other hand, Jesus was presented with an opportunity to do a good thing, knowing that with God all things are possible. To *not* have healed the man because it was the Sabbath, would have gained nothing. But because Jesus healed the man, the man, Jesus' disciples, and certainly others came to know and put faith in him as the Messiah of God.

The Pharisees were locked into their law-keeping and missed out on faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ right before their eyes.

I love the way this story ends:

35Jesus heard that they had driven [the formerly blind man out of the synagogue], and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” 36He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” 37Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” 38He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

Then turning his attention to the larger crowd including the Pharisees,

39Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” 40Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” 41Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

Personally, I did not have a dramatic conversion experience like the formerly blind man. Sometimes I am envious of those who did. But how we got here this morning is of little consequence. Now that we are here, we have learned that "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." And to have faith in things not seen takes real perseverance, but we are helped by the power of God.

I did not go to the Pool of Siloam when I was in Jerusalem, though I wish now I would have – I could have. However, maybe this is a case where we all need a good washing, a good brain - washing, (not to be confused with brainwashing) so that we get all the gunk that the world tells us out of our minds. We have been called and anointed at baptism, set apart for good works that make people whole and give them hope, and not just hope for the day, but hope for eternity.

Yes, once we were in darkness, but at some point in our lives, either by a dramatic experience or just by living the godly life, we decided to *be* children of light. And now as children of light, we have discovered and continue to discover all that is good and right and true. Let us continue to try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord, and do that.

**Prayer**

Gracious God, illumine our hearts and minds as the scriptures are read and proclaimed, so that by the Holy Spirit we may see what is good and right and true. And seeing, help us to do what is pleasing to you, so that your glory becomes visible in our words and deeds. Amen