

March 22 – Message (Grace UMC)

As we walk through Jesus' neighborhood, we brush shoulders with the people he brushed shoulders with. So, if you're a bit weary of social distancing, today is your day. Today Jesus spits on the ground, makes a little mud in his hands and rubs the mix onto a man's eyelids, then tells him to go bath in a public pool. Warning: DO NOT DO THIS AT HOME or out in the FM COMMUNITY!

All kidding aside, here how today's encounter begins. John 9:1-5 – "As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who was blind from birth. Jesus disciples asked, 'Rabbi, teacher, who sinned so that this man was born blind. Did this man sin, or was it is parents who sinned?'"

Jesus replied, "Neither this man sinned or his parents. This happened so God's ways might be shown. While it's day, we do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming. But, While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

If you we take nothing else from this Scripture today, we need to take this one thing, Jesus says, "this man isn't blind because he sinned or his parents sinned...but, we can learn; we can be enlightened; we who are often blind in spiritual matters may be able to see clearly because of him. In fact, at the end the story of Jesus and the blind man, Jesus tells the Pharisees, "if you were blind, you'd have not sin; but because you think you see clearly and don't, your sin remains."

Covid-19 is not a punishment for our sin—though when we look at our response to it and how we treat one another, we do see places and ways that we are broken. When we see those who can't be bothered to social distance—because they don't think they'll catch it, and if they don't they think they'll survive it, we may be glimpsing lack of any concern for others, a sin of selfishness. When we see hoarding of basic goods, buying hand-sanitizer to re-sell on Amazon, buying out of baby wipes by those who don't have babies, senator's secretly selling stocks before releasing information to the public, or hear those terrible phrases, "it's only 2 out of every hundred that die and most of them are elderly," we are seeing a very dark side of human nature. A loving God doesn't send a terrible virus because we are sinners. But, when such a virus arises, we do see where we are broken. The light does shine on our shortcomings.

And, honestly, we see exactly what does not help us survive. The last thing to do is have too much hand-sanitizer while some have none. The more people have hand sanitizer the better off we all are. The more tests are available, the more medical personnel that may otherwise be quarantined can be at work if only exposed to Covid-19 but not infected.

Imagine some day we have a Covid-19 vaccine and it is not share with everyone—as some have suggested it can't be free and not everyone may need it. Imagine how rampant polio would still be without a world-wide vaccine for all approach. Rotary is still working to get those last little pockets of the world vaccinated.

So, no, this blindman in Jesus' neighborhood is not more or less of a sinner than any one of us. What he is man who is asked to embrace healing and a new way of life. The man with mud

covering his eyelids goes to the pool of Siloam, washes and is healed. Suddenly, the man born blind can see.

But, blame is hard to let go of, so the religious leaders are angry, and the man's parents are scared, and the man who keeps retelling his story, slowly begins to understand what I don't think he ever believed in his life until Jesus healed him. The man is beginning to understand his years of blindness did not make him a bad person, even though he felt like he was bad and unlovable. And, those who weren't blind, or were successful, and important, and respected, that didn't necessarily make them good people.

Governor Walz, and one other governor, have included grocery-store workers, as well as some others, in the same category as health-care workers—necessary workers who are risking their lives, providing essentials for human survival and entitled to day care for their kids if needed. They've always provided that essential service—but it hasn't always been recognized as such. Cashiers and shelf-stockers of goods and food essential for survival often have been lowly paid, and parents haven't said—be a hero, be a firefighter or a grocery-store clerk. Like that man born blind many years ago helped Jesus' followers to see their world in new ways, Covid-19 is, I hope and pray, teaching us to respect and appreciate others in new ways.

Every day, if we open our eyes to see it, the world is filled with un-sung heroes who bless our lives, and all too often are living a paycheck or two away from poverty. And, like those who judged the man born blind, we are too quick to assume there must be something wrong with them if they are struggling financially.

In Jesus' neighborhood, life is meant to be different. All are meant to be healed, uplifted, appreciated, and loved into new life. All are meant to have their hearts pried open with the light of compassion and understanding.

Dr. Cameron Wiggins-Bellm of Seattle Washington wrote this prayer for a Pandemic...a prayer that reminds us how to be better neighbors, how to bless our neighbors, how to let this time lead us all to create more loving and caring neighborhoods. I heard the healing, life-giving spirit of God in it. I think you will too.

## Prayer for a Pandemic

*\*author unknown\**

May we who are *merely inconvenienced*  
remember those whose **lives are at stake**.

May we who have *no risk factors*  
remember those who are **most vulnerable**.

May we who have *the luxury of working from home*  
respect and support **those who must choose** between  
preserving their health or paying their rent.

May we who have *flexibility to care for our children*  
when their schools close  
remember **those who have no options**.

May we who have to *cancel our trips*  
remember **those who have no place to go**.

May we who are *losing on our investments*,  
remember **those who have no money to invest**.

May we who settle in for a *quarantine at home*  
remember **those who have no home**.

During this time, when we cannot physically wrap our arms  
around each other, let us each find ways to be the loving  
embrace of humanity to our neighbors.

**Be aware. Be accepting. Be supportive. Be kind.**

Please read the entirety of John 9:1-41 – The once-blind neighbor of Jesus grows into one of the wisest of Bible-Story neighbors...just through Jesus' healing love. Imagine what can happen when we, too, share that healing love.