

**March 29, 2020 – Lent V – Online/Remote Worship Service**  
**Sermon – Amazing Grace**

Since we're nearing the end of this season of Lent,  
getting ready for Holy Week and Easter,  
I've been looking back over the last few weeks.

Our focus for Lent,  
really only slightly derailed by the current crisis,  
has been freedom from fear.  
In our Sunday worship together,  
in the daily Lent devotional that many of you read,  
we've unpacked some of our fears,  
and reflected on how Jesus  
frees us from them.  
Fear of not being enough,  
of the circumstances that surround us,  
fear of being lost and not worthy of God's grace...  
...but what began as an intellectual exercise,  
from a place of relative comfort and safety,  
reflecting on our lives, our fears and our faith,  
quickly changed  
into something immediately  
and deeply relevant  
to our daily lives.

The coronavirus pandemic  
and all the economic and social fall-out that has accompanied it...  
...fear and uncertainty loom large around us.  
But...  
...I'd like to take us back a little further,  
Before the pandemic, before Lent,  
to Transfiguration Sunday,  
the last Sunday in February.

We talked about our mountain-peak encounters with God  
and what they mean to us,  
how God prepares us to live in our broken world,  
to walk faithfully through every dark valley,  
by meeting us in these bright, turning point moments  
that we forever remember in terms of  
"life before" and "life after."

Today's story of the man who was born blind  
describes his turning point encounter,  
his threshold moment,  
with Jesus.

Jesus encountered the man who was blind just outside the Temple,  
as he was walking by.  
Jesus stopped, made mud and put it on the man's eyes,  
and sent him away to wash.  
The man who was born blind could now see,  
because of Jesus.

But it's hard to find that moment,  
and easier to forget about it,  
in the midst of all the fear and uncertainty  
that surrounds it.  
The townspeople.  
The man's parents.  
The Jewish leaders.  
Even Jesus' own followers and friends.  
All afraid, and acting out of that fear.

The townspeople, upon seeing the man back among them,  
were confused at first.  
Is that the same man who used to sit and beg outside the Temple?  
Can't be...it's just someone who looks a lot like him.  
The man himself, we're told, kept saying,  
again and again, no, it's really me.  
I was blind, but now I see.  
And the townspeople,  
disconcerted and uncertain about what to do  
with this thing that has happened  
that they can't understand...  
...they're the ones who take the man  
to the Jewish leaders.  
Afraid, perhaps,  
of what they couldn't understand.

The man's parents were afraid to speak in front of the Jewish leaders,  
because they knew that it could get them ostracised,  
kicked out and sent away.  
And so they refused to stand by their son.

The Jewish leaders were afraid  
that they'd been getting it wrong, all these years;  
that what they believed,  
the rules and practices that gave them  
the power and right to lead,  
they were afraid that those beliefs were not true.  
That Jesus, who he was  
and what he was doing  
and what that meant,  
would cause them  
to lose  
that power,  
that right,  
that certainty.  
And so they lashed out,  
arguing again and again  
with the man who had been blind  
but could now see,  
fighting amongst themselves,  
eventually sending the man away,  
because he embodied everything  
that made them afraid.

And Jesus' followers.  
Right at the beginning, they ask Jesus:  
who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?  
They are protecting themselves  
from the fear of an uncertain world,  
where something like this happen to the man  
– being born without sight –  
Through no fault of his own.  
Having this false hope,  
that the man or his parents had somehow  
deserved his blindness as punishment,  
kept them safe from fear.  
But Jesus took that false hope away.

The man's neighbours,  
his parents,  
the Jewish leaders  
and Jesus' followers:  
what they say and do is all motivated by their fears.

But in the midst of all this fear and uncertainty,

showing itself in rejection, anger, false hope and betrayal,  
in the midst of all that,  
there is one incontrovertible truth  
that is stated again and again:  
I was blind, but now I see.

Among all of the characters in this story,  
only two of them are unafraid:  
Jesus and the man who could now see.  
And with his vision restored  
and the eyes of his faith wide open,  
the man who sees more clearly than anyone else in this story,  
sees the truth  
that has changed his life:  
God is good.

Life before, and life after;  
I was blind, but now I see.  
There was a man I met.  
He touched me, with mud and light.  
It turns out he was God.  
And the rest – is a song...  
...amazing grace, indeed.

It might seem strange, at a time like this,  
to spend so much time talking and thinking  
about one man's eyesight two thousand years ago.  
How can this possibly be relevant?

The world is changing – profoundly – right now.  
We are living through a turning point,  
a threshold moment,  
not just in our country's history,  
but in our world's history, as well;  
life before, and life after.  
And there is fear,  
because we don't know exactly  
what life after  
this turning point  
will be like.

History is being written right now – and relevance is an uncertain thing.

But this small personal moment between Jesus and one man,  
the relationships between one man and his community,  
these words are part of the Good News.

And that Good News has remained good;  
relevant and steadfast  
through every pivotal  
and transformational moment  
in the last two thousand years  
of history.

The Good News has stayed good through  
wars, plagues,  
upheavals, discoveries, defeats,  
the rise and fall of empires,  
recessions, depressions,  
crucifixions and resurrections.

These stories and their lessons  
and the light that shines within them  
have this incredible ability to speak  
to whatever we are going through.

Including this;  
including today.

And what this story says to us today is that,  
in the middle of this messy tale of brokenness and fear and anger,  
lies one inarguable fact:  
God is good.

And with our eyes of faith,  
restored and set free from the blindness of fear,  
we can see God's goodness at work,  
in and through and around everything in our broken world.  
The irony of this story is that by the end of it,  
the blind man who receives his sight  
sees clearly what is true,  
but everyone else in the story  
has gone blind.

So, in this difficult, ever-changing, fearful, frustrating time of uncertainty...  
...how's your faith-sight?  
How are your eyes of faith doing?  
Consider this a check-up.

Can you see where God's goodness is being revealed  
in the midst of all this brokenness?

Let me share with you what I see:  
I see that God is good  
because of the people who are working on the frontlines  
– who are bravely leaving their homes  
when the rest of us are being told to stay –  
so that we have access to things like healthcare,  
food and other essentials.

I see that God is good  
in the ways that the most vulnerable are still being cared for  
in creative ways.  
In big movements like the Drive-by Food Drive  
that happened across our communities this past week  
to help the Inn's food bank;

But also in smaller, personal ways,  
like the people who are running errands for their elderly friends and family,  
fetching groceries for those who can't leave their homes,  
making phone calls, sending emails,  
Skyping, Zooming, Facetiming...  
...because we've learned that social distancing  
doesn't have to mean that our relationships  
go untended.

I see that God is good when we,  
as the church, as Christians, as spiritual seekers,  
find ways to come together, even though we are apart,  
to encourage and build one another up in love,  
and to grow in our faith,  
even during these challenging times.

God is good...  
...and that's a fact,  
a certainty to hold onto  
in these uncertain and fearful times.  
So in the week ahead, my challenge to you  
is to remember to see the world as it is now  
through the eyes of faith;  
See where God is good,  
where God's goodness is at work,  
in and around

and because of and in spite of  
what's happening right now.  
Like the man who was blind but now sees...  
...our challenge this week is to stand  
in the midst of fear  
and speak the truth  
that changes lives,  
that heals,  
that saves:  
God is good.  
Thanks be to God!  
Amen.