

First Congregational United Church of Christ

March 19, 2023



Painting Healing of the Man Born Blind by Duccio di Buoninsegna

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Ministers: All who are a part of this church

Pastor: Rev. Enno K. Limvere

Musician: Chandler Litterst

Choir Director: Ann Russ

Peace Candle Lighter: Nancy Starr

Gathering Music

Words of Welcome

Prelude

Words of Poetry & Lighting the Candle of Peace

It is a custom in our congregation to light our Peace Candle during worship, as a witness to the Prince of Peace and our communal intention to be peace-makers as a Just Peace Church.

day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Townspeople: **“As long as love is in the world, there is light!”**

Music Interlude: Chorus #584 “I am the Light of the World”

Refrain:

I am the light of the world!
You people come and follow me!
If you follow and love, you’ll learn the mystery
of what you were meant to do and be.

1. When the song of angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone
When the sages and shepherds have found their way home.
The work of Christmas is begun.
2. To find the lost and lonely one,
To heal the broken soul with love
To feed the hungry children with warm and good food,
To feel the earth below, the sky above!
3. To free the prisoner from all chains
To make the powerful care,
To rebuild the nations with strength of good will,
To see all God’s children everywhere!
4. To bring hope to every task you do,
To dance at a baby’s new birth,
To make music in an old person’s heart,
And sing to colors of the earth!

Act One, Scene Two: A little bit of spit

Narrator 3: *Jesus and his disciples stopped in front of the beggar who was blind (visually impaired in today’s parlance), and started making mud with his spit... The beggar (or financially destitute) was getting nervous, “You don’t have to spit in my direction or on me. I know I am not worth anything. Please just leave me alone, I won’t even beg you for a small coin or two.”*

Narrator 4: *Disciples to Jesus, “What are you doing? Why can’t you just touch his eyes or command his eyes to be opened? This isn’t good to be seen doing ‘work’ on the Sabbath.” Jesus ignores them bends over to pick up the mud and starts putting it on the beggar’s eyes.*

Narrator 3: *Beggar, who now panics because he has no idea what is going on, “Hey! Hey, stop it. Are you one of those performance artists or, worse yet, my third-grade*

*I look at the world
By Langston Hughes*

*I look at the world
From awakening eyes in a black face—
And this is what I see:
This fenced-off narrow space
Assigned to me.*

*I look then at the silly walls
Through dark eyes in a dark face—
And this is what I know:
That all these walls oppression builds
Will have to go!*

*I look at my own body
With eyes no longer blind—
And I see that my own hands can make
The world that's in my mind.
Then let us hurry, comrades,
The road to find.*

Passing the Peace

Was Blind But Now I See...

Act One, Scene One: Bad things happen to bad people...

Narrator 1: *A long, long time ago in a Galilee far, far away. Well, not as long ago as the Christmas Pageant, about 30 years later, but considering it is still 2,000 years ago, it's still pretty long, long ago.*

Narrator 2: *The gospel of John tells the story of Jesus walking with his disciples, thinking about when he can hand the ministry off and follow his dream of opening a food truck, "Holy Guacamole" has a certain ring to it. When his disciples interrupted him with a question:*

Narrator 1: *"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents for him to be born blind?" They asked this because the prevailing wisdom of the time was that good people got good things and bad people got bad things. Everyone knew the story of Job, but that was just a fairy tale. Someone must have done something bad for a baby to be born blind. Thank God we have evolved in our thinking and compassion.*

Narrator 2: *Jesus thought, "Me! When are they going to learn?" He told his disciples, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."⁴ We must work the works of God who sent me while it is*

bully, Rueben? I have rights you know, if I was living in a society and a time where people had rights!"

Narrator 4: Jesus finishes putting on the mud, gently grabs the beggar's shoulders, leans in and asks, "Do you want to receive your sight?" The beggar thinks about it and says, "Yes, if nothing else, so I can go and punch Rueben." Jesus stands back and proclaims, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent).

Townspeople: "We want to receive the true sight of love."

Music Interlude: Children Go Where I Send Thee

Refrain:

Children, go where I send thee. How shall I send thee?

1 I'm gonna send thee one by one, one is the little bitty baby was born, born, born in Bethlehem. [Refrain]

2 I'm gonna send thee two by two, two are Paul and Silas one is the little, bitty baby was born, born, born in Bethlehem. [Refrain]

3 I'm gonna send thee three by three, three are the Hebrew children, two are Paul and Silas one is the little, bitty baby was born, born, born in Bethlehem. [Refrain]

4 I'm gonna send thee four by four, four are the gospel writers, three are the Hebrew children, two are Paul and Silas one is the little, bitty baby was born, born, born in Bethlehem. [Refrain]

Act One, Scene Three: As I go down to the River to Bathe

Narrator 5: So, the beggar starts toward the pool of Siloam. "You know this would go much faster if someone were to help guide me! I can't see anything because I have this mud on my eyes! I couldn't see anything even if this mud weren't on my eyes!" But as he continues to grumble, he slowly makes his way there.

Narrator 6: As he kneels down by the pool, it used to be bigger (city funding cuts) and washes off the mud made by road dirt and spittle he notices light coming into his eyes and then shapes and colors appear. He looks into the pool and sees his reflection, but doesn't know it is himself and thinks, "Whatever else happened in my life, at least I am not as ugly as that guy."

Narrator 5: He gets up and looks around, eyes full of wonder, that must be people, and the sky, the sun, and that must be a tree and a house and a donkey. It just so happened that a caravan from India was coming through with an elephant. He asks someone what it was, "What is that?" "It's an elephant," was the reply. The beggar thought to himself, "I remember when I was a kid and my dad let me touch one once, I just through it was a tree trunk."

Narrator 6: He wants to go back to the neighborhood and show his family and friends that he can see, he wants to praise God and find the one who healed him, he also

wants to find Rueben. But now that he can see, he is totally disoriented, "Can anyone tell me how to get to Olive Terrace Road? I was blind, but now I see, but I don't have anyone to lead me on the right path. Can anyone help me? I see you just ignoring me! Hey you...."

Townspople: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a beggar like me. I am still lost, though also found, was blind, but now I see."

Music Interlude: Blindman (with Guitar)

Blind man stood by the road and he cried, (3x)

He cried, Oh-oh-oh,

Show me the way, Show me the way, show me the way,

The way to go home!

Woman stood by the well and she cried, (3x)

She cried, Oh-oh-oh, Show me the way,

Show me the way, show me the way,

The way to go home!

Nicodemus came in the night and he cried, (3x)

He cried, Oh-oh-oh, Show me the way,

Show me the way, show me the way,

The way to go home!

Jesus stood by the road and he cried, (3x)

He cried, Oh-oh-oh, I am the way,

I am the truth, I am the life,

The way to go home! Blindman!

Act Two, Scene One: Out of the pool and into the Kettle

Narrator 1: A crowd gathered around the beggar noticing that he now had his sight. They were dumbfounded, astonished, flabbergasted, stunned... (Narrator 2: "Drop the thesaurus and get on with it!") to see this man who was blind from birth now seeing. They questioned each other if it was really him.

Narrator 2: "Hey, I was blind, not deaf! Of course, it is me. But to see all of you Wally wagging, it's not a great sight." They grabbed him and took him to the Pharisees because they would be able to sort this out, for they were experts about all things religious, or so they said.

Narrator 1: The Pharisees were having a good day. They were well fed at Shabbat last night, only minimal chores this morning and now they sit in the best seats on the synagogue and get to look down on everyone. There seemed to be some kind of kerfuffle outside and getting louder.

Choir: Come On Man, Now Tell Us Truly Verse 1

Townspople: (speaking excitedly and incoherently) blah blah blah, can you believe him...

Narrator 2: *The crowd burst through the door dragging a man with them. He looked like the beggar who sat outside, but that one was blind and this one was wildly looking at everything. They motioned for silence and an explanation. (Narrator 1: "Well, which one did they want, silence or an explanation?")*

Narrator 2: *Anywhooo, the crowd explained that this blind man could now see because Jesus put mud on his eyes and made him wash in the pool of Siloam.*

Narrator 1: *"Explain it to us one more time!" the Pharisees said leaning forward menacingly. The beggar replied, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees made a snap judgment that Jesus couldn't be of God because he didn't observe the Sabbath. Others retorted, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" Azariah, one of the Pharisees trying to look thoughtful, thought, 'This isn't going to end well; it might not end at all. Oy, now I will never get out of here to watch the game,'*

Choir: Come On Man, Now Tell Us Truly Verse 2

Narrator 2: *Tobit, one of the leaders, quieted them down and asked the beggar, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened?" "He is a prophet," replied the beggar. Some of the Pharisees starting looking uncomfortable themselves as the beggar starting matching the voices to the faces, smiling at some who were kind, and frowning at others, not so much.*

Townspeople: **"All the laws and the prophets add up to this, to treat others as you want to be treated."**

Music "They'll know we are Christians by our love"

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord

And we pray that all unity may one day be restored

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love

They will know we are Christians by our love

We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand

We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand

And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love

They will know we are Christians by our love

Act Two, Scene Two: Wait until your parents get here!

Narrator 3: *Some Pharisees needed verification needed proof that this man who can see was the beggar who are born blind. Since he didn't have any ID and DNA tests were a couple thousand years away, all they could do is send for the parents. They had a good enough reputation, but there were lots of stares when their child was born blind, silent accusations never said aloud..*

Narrator 4: *The parents were coming anyway because the rumors fly fast in this*

town. Could it be true, could it be real? Our son can see? They arrived shortly after being sent for and saw their son in corner. He was looking at around and then at them. Ezra and Judith, who saw him looking at them, leaped with joy and started praising God and ran towards him. The beggar, never seen his parents before, saw this couple charging him and shrank back. Before he could do anything else, they embraced him and whispered their love, and he knew by smell, touch, and voice, these were his parents. Though his dad kind of looked like that ugly guy he seen earlier.

Narrator 3: After a joyful reunion, the parents were brought in front of the Pharisees. They demanded answers, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

Choir: Come on Man, Now Tell Us Truly Verse 3

The parents were scared as all eyes were on them, even their own son's. They were confused as this should be joyous for all, but too many seemed accusatory and the crowd was not friendly. Judith found her voice, "We know that 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."

Narrator 4: Back in the early first century and before, the Israel people were under Roman rule and there were lots of people who claimed to be the Messiah and there were lots of rebellions against the Roman occupiers. As those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God, a wedge started to grow between the Jews and those who called themselves the followers of the Way. Those who wrote the Gospel of John were living in a time when there was a great divide between Jews and now what we call Christians. Those who confessed Jesus as Lord were kicked out of synagogues and communities and jailed by the Roman occupiers. We will now take a commercial break now. Will the beggar crumble under pressure when we get back? Will his parents show him a whole new world? Will the Pharisee Azariah get to see the game? Where is Jesus? Stay tuned...

Commercial for the First Congregational (Done by Pastor Enno)

Act Two, Scene Three: Into the Great Wide Open...

Narrator 5: When we left, the parents were unsure what they were supposed to say, the Pharisees were divided about how this miracle happened now it has been verified this beggar was born blind, and the beggar started worrying about what kind of job he could get as he had no skills, maybe he could be a private detective "Fresh Eyes, Private Eye."

Narrator 6: The Pharisees continued to hound them and proclaim Jesus a sinner because he 'worked' on the Sabbath. They looked for the loophole, the explanation of how his eyes were healed not by God but by something else. The beggar replied, "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 God does listen to one who worships and obeys. 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."

Choir: Come On Man, Now Tell Us Truly Verse 4

Narrator 5: That was enough, the Pharisees decided, "You were born entirely in sin, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. "At least I can catch the rest of the game," thought Azariah. Jesus wasn't too far off and heard what happened. He went to find the beggar, caught between walking angrily with fists clenched and open eyes looking everywhere filled with wonder. Jesus approached him with a warm smile and kindness in his eyes. The beggar hands unclenched, took a deep breath, and smiled back. "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" asked Jesus. He looked at Jesus and replied, "Lord, I believe."

Narrator 6: Jesus told him and his disciples, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some Pharisees unable to let it go also found the beggar and jumped in, "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.'" And this concludes today's story, the ponderings of this story are to consider how we are blind and what do we really see. Do we rejoice in the healings in this world or do we look for ways to control healings and power for ourselves?

Townsppeople: "Help us have eyes to see, ears to listen, minds for wisdom, and hearts for love."

Musical Reflections

Joys and Concerns, Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, Mother God, 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. Amen

News of God at Work in our Congregation & Community

Our Time of Giving

Doxology

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;*

*Alleluia, alleluia
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One.
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.*

Closing Hymn #50 I Sing the Praise of Love Almighty

1. I sing the praise of Love almighty,
Which shines revealed in Jesus' face,
I offer up all that delights me,
All mean desires each fond embrace.
Turn from myself in pure devotion,
And eager plunge in love's vast ocean.
2. How loving kind you are,
How gentle, how your heart reaches after mine
My heart responds in elemental sympathy,
beating perfect time.
This mutual love, this strong attraction,
I know no other satisfaction.
3. Secure my heart and all my being,
in you my savior crucified.
You gave your life to work my healing
Bleeding for me, you groaned and died.
Beloved Jesus, my salvation,
You have, through love, restored creation.
4. May my heart hear the deep impression
of love that Jesus shares with me,
My life become a pure expression
Of all that Christian love can be;
Each word, each act a bright reflection of Joy in
Love's own resurrection

Benediction

Sending Music