**Worship Plan for Sunday, March 19, 2023** **\* Fourth Sunday in Lent**

**Introduction to the day**

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.

**Gathering:** The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**Greeting:** Welcome to worship today, we are glad to have you with our Faith Lutheran Church community. I'm Pr. John Barton and I will be leading our service today. This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

**ASSISTING MINISTER: Announcements**

Monday, the 20th: Remembering & Honoring meet at 10:00 in person; Hymn Planners meet at 2:00 on Zoom

Tuesday, the 21st: 4 Plus 1 Group meets at 10:00 in person; Special Council Meeting re Sound System at 1:00

Wednesday, the 22nd: Finance Team meets at 1:00 in person and on Zoom; Outreach meets at 3:00; Lent Soup & Study begins at 5:00

Thursday, the 23rd: Bible Study begins at 2:00 in person and on Zoom

Friday, the 24th: Al-Anon meets at 10:30 in the Fellowship Hall

Saturday, the 25th: Blessing of the Animals at 10:00 in the parking lot. Bring your pets, and bring your friends with pets. Bring stuffed animals, animal mementos, and pictures of animals. This is a great opportunity to invite the community to our church.

For the month of March we are collecting 16 oz. bags of rice and beans for the Community Cupboard. They also need plastic grocery bags and empty egg cartons.

It's that time again....Easter Lily time! If you would like to purchase an Easter Lily for Easter Sunday, there is an order form in your mailbox. They are $16.50 each and the deadline to order is March 26th.

The Snip ‘N Stitch Quilters group is meeting for their first gathering in several years in the Fellowship Hall on Thursday, April 6, 9:00 am-12:00 noon. Eleanor Diaz will be heading up the group. All women of the church are welcome. If you have any questions, please call Bea Olsen, W-ELCA President, at (951) 370-3600.

For more information and a complete monthly calendar, contact the church office. Thank you!

Let us take a moment of silence to quiet our hearts and minds and prepare for worship.

**Gathering Song:*Great Is Thy Faithfulness* (ELW 733)**

**Confession and Forgiveness**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God, who forgives all our sin, whose mercy endures forever. **Amen.**

God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Most merciful God,

**we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.**

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

**Prayer of the Day**

Let us pray. Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into the darkness of our hearts, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Children's Chat**

**Word:** God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

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

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.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

**PsalmODY:** Psalm 23

1The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.

2**The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.**

3You restore my soul, O Lord, and guide me along right pathways for your name’s sake.

4**Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

5You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

6**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

**Amen.**

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

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.”

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

**Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.**

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

The holy gospel according to John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

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?” 3Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. 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.” 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). 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.” 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! 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. 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?” And they drove him out. 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.”

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

**Sermon:** Grace to you and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This week marked the 3rd anniversary of the pandemic in this country during which we felt blinded and cut off from society by COVID like the blind man in the Gospel.

I was blind. Now I see. Two short statements. Short but not small. It is what the man born blind says, it is what the writer of Amazing Grace said, too. A former slave ship captain John Newton had his heart opened in faith and renounced his ways becoming an abolitionist. With his own eyes failing him in sight, Newton lived to see the British Empire's [abolition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slave_Trade_Act_1807) of the African slave trade in 1807, just months before his death. Newton “saw” his whole nation transformed.

We usually reserve much of our theological energy for talking about transformation for transfiguration Sunday, but really, we experience the transformational power of God throughout the year, throughout our whole lives. This power can be on small scale, such as deciding to go ahead and make that call to that friend that we haven't seen in a while, a seemingly small gesture which can change their whole day or the whole week or more for that friend. And it can be on the scale of changing whole nations, empires like that of the British empire in John Newton's time. This transformational power comes in all different modes, only dependent on the infinite imagination of God. But one way which we usually begin our lives with is the transformation of baptism, a transformation of faith. The healing the blind man received was a kind of baptism, a kind of transformation. To our eyes all that changes in baptism is we get a little wet. In that water however, whether sprinkled or submerged, God opens the eyes of our hearts, revealing a bit more of God's mystery in the process so that we can see a bit more of what God sees in us. God takes ordinary elements, ordinary water, ordinary people and does something what alchemists and magicians of fiction can only dream of… changes us into something much more everyday than gold or magic…children of the living God.

To illustrate this power of transformation in history, here is a serious question with a real-world answer. What do the Irish potato famine in 1847, a native American tribe, and COVID have in common?

The Choctaw nation in the US sent $170 of their money to assist the Irish people who were suffering from the famine. We can appreciate that the $170 was worth more back then, but even more since just 16 years prior to 1847, the Choctaws were made to endure the forced migration of the Trail of Tears where almost a third of their people had died. So even though their own hardships were still fresh for them, even though Ireland was across the world from them and had no previous connections to them, the Choctaw people gave of what they had because they saw it as the right thing to do.

173 years later, in 2020, COVID was ripping through Native American communities. When the news of this reached the Irish people, they remembered. They remembered the assistance to their ancestors from the people who were now in singular distress within a world of distress. The people of Ireland remembered and donated more than $7 million to the tribes hit hardest. All of this came to be because of the spark and act of kindness almost 200 years ago, sparking a brotherhood of different people with the same heart for helping and the spirit of lifting people up who need it, using what they have and sharing it to affect real change and transformation which can save lives.

We walk in the man's footsteps from the story, we lose our initial descriptive title of "being born blind", and are transformed by the truth bringer, the one who says of himself "I am the light" and who give us the title of the man too, the ones who were no longer blind, but healed and seeing.

Jesus' miracle in the Gospel of giving sight to the blind is a sign, the sign just before raising Lazarus from the dead, involved physical impossibilities achieved miraculously, done so that others may see and believe. But it is also pointing to a deeper message, about Jesus’ identity.

As one commentator put it "Jesus is the giver of sight and revealer of truth. The details of the story describe the illuminating traits of Jesus, both in the literal and the figurative senses. Jesus physically restores sight to a man (9:7-8), he claims in a metaphorical sense to be “the light of the world” (9:5), and he reveals the truth of his own identity as the Son of Man (9:37) while challenging the Pharisees’ blindness to that central truth (9:41)."

For those of you keeping track, the gospel was 41 verses, and that's a lot to take in. Most of the time we have something like 10 to 20 verses and people oftentimes start having glazed eyes when I get to that 20 verse side of things. So, when we have scriptures like this where it's 41 verses, we're not used to listening to all that in one go on a given Sunday. I think it's sometimes helps for these longer readings to think of them as mini plays. This Gospel reading in particular could be seen as seven scenes: "Jesus heals the man (9:1-7), the neighbors question the man (9:8-12), the Pharisees question him (9:13-17), the Jews question the parents (9:18-23), the Jews converse again with the man (9:24-34), Jesus revisits the man (9:35-39), and Jesus challenges the Pharisees (9:40-41)." And what's interesting in this is that the four middle scenes do not have Jesus present there, forming the longest continuous passage chronicling the time of Jesus' ministry where He is not present. But in a way, it shows that Jesus does not need to be right in front of our eyes or speaking like we speak to each other for him to be present with us. Jesus enabled the man who was healed to be able to have a permanent source of confidence and support in his connection and transformation by Jesus.

The French philosopher, writer, and Nobel prize winner Albert Camus gives a striking description of this dichotomy, this looking at the two halves of reality, that which is easy to see and can produce anxiety at times, versus the permanence and ultimate perseverance of that which is good in existence.

He said, "In the midst of hate, I found there was, within me, an invincible love. In the midst of tears, I found there was, within me, an invincible smile. In the midst of chaos, I found there was, within me, an invincible calm. I realized, through it all, that in the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger- something better, pushing right back."

Whether it was the last 3 years since the beginning of the pandemic, or the years passed, there have been distinct times when we have felt distinct loss of hope, loss of sight forward where we needed Jesus to be our sight, to be our light guiding us forward, to be our sure hope and rock which anchors us. So, though the periods of uncertainty in our life like the pandemic create fear which makes us want to close our eyes and our hearts to the world, Jesus is that invincible presence who speaks gently into our ear and directly into our hearts to open them up again. He needs no crowbars or jaws of life to do this, because His power is beyond this world and infused in this world, And each one of us. May you always be transformed by the healing power of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Hymn of the Day:*Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound* (ELW 779)**

**ASSISTING MINISTER:** We continue as we confess our faith using the words of the Apostle's Creed.

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator 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.**

**Pastor and Assisting Minister: Prayers of Intercession**

Sustained by God’s abundant mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of creation.

Eternal God, you seal us by the Holy Spirit and mark us with the cross of Christ forever in baptism. Inspire us by your love as together we strive for justice and peace in all the earth. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Creating God, by your word you have made all things, and you hate nothing you have made. Teach us to perceive the beauty of the breadth of your creation, from the grandest mountain range to the smallest springtime bud. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Powerful God, you anoint kings and establish rulers. Guide the work of heads of state and elected officials. Encourage them to lead with justice and to remove barriers that impede the well-being of all. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Shepherding God, you lead us beside still waters and restore our souls. Keep watch over those who weep; tend all who are sick and comfort those who grieve, especially Ashlee, Nancy Blackmer; JoLynne Buehring; Arnette Calkins; Vicki Crow; Stephanie DeSimone; Arlene Dressler; Carole Erickson; Marge Fulton; Kally Homchick; Mimi Houghtaling; Gina Howe; Donna McCain; Mike McGavran; Jean Miles; Sandra Miller; Thordis Moe; Sheila Neal; Elaine Olsen; Wilma Parker; Andrew Quinn; JoAnne Schriock; Bill and Dee Seel; Amy Sinclair; Joyce Stromberg; Jim and Kay Thomas; the Varsobia family; Diana Ward; the homebound; the emergency responders; and those grieving and anticipating surgery/tests. We especially pray for those affected by COVID-19 and those who have lost loved ones. At this time we also pray for those we name aloud or silently in our hearts. Give them your living water always. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

God our host, you fill us at your table with more than we could ever ask. Feed us with hunger for justice. Equip the feeding ministries of this congregation and community. Nourish us so we can nourish our neighbors. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

God of history, with thanksgiving we remember our ancestors in faith who cared for your people. We praise you for the ways they formed the faith of others and continue to inspire us. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your steadfast love and your promise to renew your whole creation; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

**Peace:** The peace of the Lord be with you always. **And also with you.**

**Offering**

At this time, we remember that the giving of our offering is an authentic part of worship. Whether you give of your time, talents, or treasures, a combination of them, or are discerning how you can give to God's beloved community, thank you so much for all the ways you give and help to make the ministries of this church possible!

**ASSISTING MINISTER: Offering Prayer**

Let us pray. God our provider, you have not fed us with bread alone, but with words of grace and life. Bless us and these your gifts, which we receive from your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**Musical Offering:*Be Thou My Vision* (ELW 793)**

**Meal:** God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

**Great Thanksgiving**

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places

give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. You call your people to cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the paschal feast, that, renewed in the gift of baptism, we may come to the fullness of your grace. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, Lord God of pow’r and might: Heav’n and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

**INSTRUCTION FOR COMMUNION:** As you are comfortable, you are invited to come forward to receive communion. All of God’s children are welcome to Christ’s table.

Gather at the altar rail to receive the communion elements or if you wish to receive a blessing, please cross your arms over your chest. You may commune yourself once you’ve received the communion elements. Please commune the bread first, turn over the vessel and then carefully open the grape juice. A gluten-free option is available upon request. Please deposit empty cups in the provided baskets on your way back to your seat.

If you would like communion brought to you at your seat, indicate by raising your hand for the Assisting Minister to see and they will bring communion to you.

Blessed are you, O God of the universe. Your mercy is everlasting and your faithfulness endures from age to age.

Praise to you for creating the heavens and the earth. Praise to you for saving the earth from the waters of the flood. Praise to you for bringing the Israelites safely through the sea. Praise to you for leading your people through the wilderness to the land of milk and honey. Praise to you for the words and deeds of Jesus, your anointed one. Praise to you for the death and resurrection of Christ. Praise to you for your Spirit poured out on all nations.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

With this bread and cup we remember our Lord’s passover from death to life as we proclaim the mystery of faith: **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

O God of resurrection and new life: Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine. Bless this feast. Grace our table with your presence. **Come, Holy Spirit.**

 Reveal yourself to us in the breaking of the bread. Raise us up as the body of Christ for the world. Breathe new life into us. Send us forth, burning with justice, peace, and love. **Come, Holy Spirit.**

With your holy ones of all times and places, with the earth and all its creatures, with sun and moon and stars, we praise you, O God, blessed and holy Trinity,

now and forever. **Amen.**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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.**

**Invitation to Communion:** Taste and see that the Lord is good.

**During Distribution: *One Bread, One Body* (ELW 496)**

**During Distribution: *Eat This Bread: Jesus Christ, Bread of Life* (ELW 472)**

**Communion**

The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you. Amen.

**Prayer after Communion**

Let us pray. Compassionate God, you have fed us with the bread of heaven. Sustain us in our Lenten pilgrimage: may our fasting be hunger for justice; our alms, a making of peace; and our prayer, the song of grateful hearts, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

**Blessing:** The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord’s face shine on you with grace and mercy. The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace. **Amen.**

**Sending Song:*Bless Now, O God, the Journey* (ELW 326)**

**ASSISTING MINISTER: Dismissal**

Go in peace. Serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

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