

Sermon For Sunday March 15 2026

Washing in the Life-Giving Water, Lent 4 (A)

Lent draws the faithful – sometimes kicking and screaming – to a period of spiritual preparation and renewal in anticipation of the coming jubilation of Eastertide. Throughout the history of the church, candidates for Holy Baptism would often engage in rigorous study, prayer and fasting during Lent. It was also the time when those who had committed “notorious sins” and were separated from the church would reconcile with God and one another in order to be restored to communion in time for Easter. Lent was, and remains, a time in which all Christians are called to reorient themselves from the distractions of sin, apathy and mundaneness, and return to the life-giving will of God.

The Gospel of John calls the faithful to do the same. It stands as a powerful and provocative witness to the fact that in Jesus Christ, God has revealed Godself to the world. John’s gospel begins by calling Jesus, simply but profoundly, “the Word.” In that first chapter, John employs powerful theological phrases in reference to Jesus, calling him the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!”

The Gospel of John describes Jesus, not simply as a miracle worker or faith healer, but rather a worker of signs, each pointing beyond itself to a larger truth. Here in Chapter 9, Jesus works a sign by healing a man who was blind from birth. As word of what Jesus did begins to spread, the Pharisees puff their chests, saying, “If Jesus really was from God, he would have known that the law prohibits such actions on the Sabbath.” But in questioning the legality of what Jesus did, the Pharisees miss the larger point. They focus on the action itself, and not the larger truth that the action reveals.

The blind man receiving sight isn’t the point of the story – at least, not entirely. The man’s physical traits are only a part of the larger narrative. What is more to the point, however, is what the blind man’s relationship with Jesus teaches us about our own relationship with Jesus. John Chapter 9 is a sign that calls attention, not to the story’s resolution, but to the ways in which we find ourselves caught up in the midst of the story.

The disciples ask Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” They assumed, as most people did in those days, that suffering was the result of sinfulness. As the disciples’ question meets our ears, we may find ourselves thinking, not of physical blindness, but of other scourges that plague us. We watch helplessly as the news reports endlessly on the wars in Iran and the Ukraine. We shed a tear at a bombing in Iran of 150 innocent children who were in school being taught. We weep as we hear of yet another life cut short by bullying. We feel inexplicable anger at the grim prognosis of a young mother stricken with cancer. “What have we done to deserve this?” we wonder. “Is God punishing us?” we ask. Suddenly, we realize that the disciples’ question is familiar because it is one that we have all asked of God ourselves.

And yet Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ question – to our question – is unwavering: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned.”

Jesus reminds us that the axiom is true, indeed: Sometimes bad things happen to good people. But Jesus goes beyond platitudes: “He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” Jesus shows the disciples and all of us that, even in the midst of things we cannot understand, God is at work.

And to prove it, Jesus works a sign. He gives the man sight, yes, but he also gives him something much greater. The man couldn’t quite put into words what had happened to him. He didn’t know exactly why it had happened. But he knew the Saviour’s voice! And so, when Jesus says to him, “Go, wash,” he does just that. He hears the Saviour’s voice, he follows it, and at long last, he sees Jesus. And he cries out, “Lord, I believe!” as he falls down and worships at Jesus’ feet.

This is the story that Jesus invites us into. Who among us has not experienced spiritual blindness in one form or another?

When we put ourselves before others, we are blind.

When we hold grudges and refuse to forgive, we are blind.

When we do what is easy instead of what is right, we are blind.

Blindness affects our communities, as well. Economic, social and political systems turn a blind eye to the poor, the outcast and the marginalized in every corner of the world.

And who among us has not experienced suffering at one point or another? Depression, anxiety, abuse, neglect, broken relationships, illness, lost jobs, fear – the list goes on.

Suffering plagues our communities do, too. Natural disasters, local tragedies, unforeseen deaths of young people – none of us is immune.

Of course, there are those who will attempt to lull us into believing that faith not only brings an end to suffering and blindness, but that it also makes our hurts and pains disappear. But the hard truth is that this simply isn't so. After all, even after the blind man received his sight, he was faced with the rejection of his friends and family. Suffering is painful. Grief is awful – even horrifying at times. But it is an inescapable part of our humanity.

And the powerful and life-giving truth of the gospel is that our suffering and grief will not have the last word. As our souls and bodies desperately cry out for relief, we hear the faint yet clear voice of the risen Christ calling us; reminding us that, through the cross, death and its trappings have been swallowed up in victory. The final word rests, not with suffering and blindness, but with life and peace.

And then we hear the most sublime words imaginable, “Go, wash.” And as the cool and refreshing waters of life wash over us, our eyes and our hearts are opened to behold the living Christ, standing as the chains of death and hell lay broken at his feet. And our voice cries out at last, “Lord! I believe!”