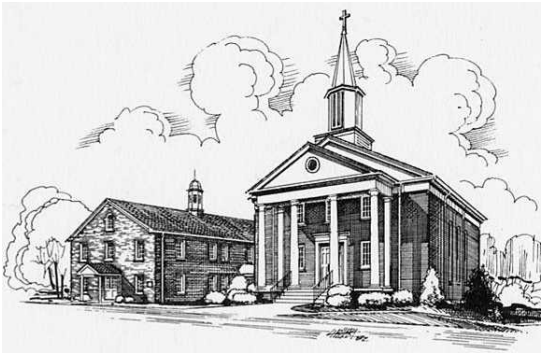
The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Year A

RCL



1 Samuel 16:1-13
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41
Psalm 23

The Collect

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*.

Ephesians 5:8-14

Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

"Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."

John 9:1-5

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

SERMON

Sometimes, the Lectionary gives us two passages that go together hand in glove in such a perfect fit that it almost requires no effort from me to come up with a sermon. That's the case this Sunday, and I only wish we could all be together to share it. I think Paul had the right idea with his house churches. People who know each other and share each others pains and celebrations are more likely to receive a blessing from church attendance, but here we are, separated by a virus so small you can't see it. It's up to us to make the best of a bad situation and to stay connected with each other, through these remote worship services and the old fashioned telephone so that our community may be

strengthened.

Let's dig into our texts for today. Scholars have had a great time over the past century or more debating whether or not Paul actually wrote our epistle this week. Current thinking is that Ephesians is pseudonymous. Nevertheless, there is no overstating its importance. The Interpreter's Bible describes it like this:

> **The Epistle to the Ephesians occupies a place of supreme importance in the history of Christian theology. It could almost be said that through the centuries the influence of Paul has been felt primarily through this epistle...in all schools the conception of the church – of its essential nature of the body of Christ, and of its mission to unite all races and nations in a single brotherhood of worship**

and love – has been shaped and governed by the exposition which it receives in this epistle.[1]

Whether Paul or one of his disciples wrote it, that phrase describing the church as "the body of Christ" is the point I want to give you this Sunday. That we are physically separate one from the other because of health concerns does not mean that we are separate from one another. The church as the body of Christ has adequate room and more for all of us, even through a challenge such as we now face. As part of the body of Christ, our obligation to, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness" is not lessened by this virus. Instead, we are called to even greater acts of compassion for some in our community <u>will</u> suffer. It is the strength and

1 "The Interpreter's Bible in Twelve Volumes" Volume 10, Abingdon Press ©1953

compassion we find in challenges such as this which the writer calls,

> ...the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

Being separate in this way gives us an opportunity to think more deeply about the connection which binds us together. Consciously or unconsciously, we tend to think about our faith in terms of personal salvation – what can I do to go to heaven when I die? To focus on such terms is to ignore the responsibility that being a part of the body of Christ imposes upon us. We are no longer free agents. Tom Brady can walk away from the Patriots, but we cannot walk away from the body of Christ anymore than your kidneys could go walkabout without the rest of you. Even separated as we

are, the church is the body of Christ and we are its members.

Our Gospel passage sets out the "fruit of the light" in a real-world situation.

> As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

The man is blind. He has no concept of light. The parallel with those of the world who similarly have not seen the light is too obvious to require comment. Jesus is doing what he came into the world

to do – address that blindness. He has His work cut out for him. The disciples ask “Who sinned?” They understand God as an angry parent who hands out harsh punishment to the disobedient. Jesus corrects them.

> Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day

Two things happened this week that made me focus on the error of thinking of God as an angry, punishing parent. The first is a classmate of ours who went into the missionary field right out of college, to Africa. There he has stayed true to his call for decades. Because of the virus, he is now stuck in Uganda and can’t get home. This is the life to

which he was called, a self-sacrificing life. Does that sound like a punishing parent to you, or does it reflect God's love for his children?

The second event happened when Ronnie reminded me that because we are not gathered together, some will forget the collection plate. That's critical for us right now. The church secretary needs her paycheck and we have just learned that the church janitor was laid off and relies on his check to pay his mortgage. Ronnie asked me to add a button to the church website directing the congregation how to make their offering remotely. Here's the problem: due to my disease, I no longer know how to do that. That skill, like others, has blown away in the winds of dementia.

I didn’t know what to do so I called the help line. A friendly lady listened as I related the problem I needed to solve, and confessed that my disease had taken that skill from me. She quietly told me not to worry. Her grandmother has dementia and her grandfather has Parkinson’s, she said, so she understood. Then, she said the most remarkable thing, “I’m not supposed to do this, but hold on”. In a few minutes she made the changes we needed. I asked if I could pay her for her work. She answered, “Only one prayer”. Give thanks to God for His daughter Christina in your prayers.

True, we’re separated one from the other right now. We can’t pass the peace, but we are not free to abandon the works of the body of Christ. We

still can reach out to one another by telephone. We can offer comfort to our brother Paul as he recovers from surgery to repair his hip. We can sustain our sister Jeanette as she cares for him.

Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

I don't think I could add anything to that to make it clearer. We, the members of the body of Christ, are called to cure the blindness of the world. We must be about our calling!

AMEN

BENEDICTION

I've heard people complain about the restrictions on our movement to prevent the spread of this virus. I've heard people say that 80% of those infected will survive with no trouble. That's the problem with viewing our faith as a way to get to heaven when we die. It isn't about you. It is about the others. We didn't stay home this week so I wouldn't get sick. We stayed home to protect those around me whose health is such that should they get the disease, they would not survive.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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