

*In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

How did you hear this story this time, in light of what we are living through,  
global pandemic, massive societal shut-down?  
What elements jumped out at you?

Each time we hear a bible story, we hear it in a new way.  
Because we are not the same as we were the last time we heard it.  
Because our circumstances are not the same as the last time we heard it.  
Because the world is never the same as the last time we heard it.  
That feels more true right now than it ever has.

At the beginning of this story, Jesus' disciples ask him  
why this man was born blind. "Who sinned?" they say.  
The only way they can understand infirmity is to see it as judgment for sin.  
There are some who will say COVID-19 is punishment for somebody's sin;  
and some will lay blame for the weakness and disorganization of our response.  
That is human nature – to look for patterns, to seek someone to blame.  
Yet it's not always someone's fault. There are not always patterns.  
And suffering is not God's will; it is an inevitable outcome of free will.  
We are only promised that God will be with us in it.

Jesus answers that this man was born blind so that God's works,  
God's power could be revealed in his life. I don't think that means  
he was picked out for misfortune, though it could be read that way.  
It just means in every infirmity, every hurt, every injustice there is  
opportunity for healing, physical, emotional, spiritual or societal.  
And friends, if ever there was an opportunity to reveal God's power to the world,  
It is coronavirus. Times like these are what the church is meant for.

How do we live into our mission to "carry God's contagious love into the world"  
In a time of worldwide contagion?  
How do we affirm the unity of Christ's Body in a time of social distancing?  
How do we proclaim life and love and mission in the face of death and panic  
and economic devastation for millions?  
And yet I say again – times like these are what the church is meant for.

Does that excite you? Or scare you to death? Do you fear we are not up to it? Well, faith is not based on what we are up to, but on what we know God is up to. Faith is not based on what we are up to, but on what we know God is up to. Sometimes our vision gets in the way.

The Gospels are full of stories of blind people who see the truth much more clearly than the sighted people around them. Undistracted by all the input and stimuli that bombard the sighted, they hone their spiritual sight.

This once-blind man is certainly one of the healthiest people recorded in the Gospels. He sees right through the Pharisees and their phony investigations – he tells the truth, but not what they want to hear, and he calls them on that. “Do you also want to become his disciples?” is wonderful sarcasm. He is clear about what happened to him, and fearless about speaking the truth. And when Jesus identifies himself as the Messiah, as he did to the Samaritan woman, this man immediately believes and worships him. He is ready to see.

His greatest weakness has become the source of his greatest strength.

Physical blindness has prepared him for spiritual sight.

That is what we could call a “Kingdom principle” – that our weaknesses, where we are most vulnerable, is often where God can use us best.

We see this most clearly in Jesus’ death on the cross, which looked like the ultimate humiliation, weakness and defeat.

But Paul wrote so eloquently:

*But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;*

*God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.*

Paul realized that, “God’s strength is made perfect in my weakness.”

It’s when we know “we got nothing” that God’s power can best be revealed in us.

We see it in the Old Testament as well – in our reading today, all those older sons of Jesse, big and strong, are passed over until young David is summoned from the fields. God even says to Samuel, “Don’t judge by outward appearance.”

David is who God has chosen, young as he is –

and God works through him time and again, especially in his weaknesses.

In fact, God seems always to choose younger sons to be carriers of the Promise – Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau; Joseph, not Jacob’s older sons.

All of these younger sons are very flawed – God chooses them anyway.

This is good news for us, my friends, because if you are like me, you have plenty of weaknesses and flaws!

As churches, we may not feel equal to this moment.

We may feel too small, too tepid, too insignificant to make an impact.  
But our gifts and your weaknesses are two sides of the same coin.  
This is not to make us complacent about the ways in which we are weak,  
but to offer these weaknesses to God for God to transform and redeem.

The fact that we're small means we can be nimble, pivot quickly to meet needs.  
The fact that we're hundreds of years old, not the newest game in town means we  
have a structure to support our efforts, and a mission network in our diocese.  
As we see our weaknesses as places for God to work,  
we can find the way to open ourselves for healing and strengthening.  
It's when we know "we got nothing" that God's power can best be revealed in us.

So, what can God possibly do through Christ Church  
in a medical and economic disaster zone? So much. So much.  
We can partner with other faith communities and agencies to  
collect and distribute food and funds. We can help arrange deliveries.  
We can develop pastoral support to first responders and overworked medical folks.

Those are just some of the tangibles. It is in the intangibles we will really shine.  
We have gifts to share that the world is starving for –  
We can bring the Holy Spirit's **comfort** in the face of unimaginable loss.  
We can bring Christ's spirit of **peace** in the face of conflict and tension.  
We can bring an eternal **hope** in the face of devastation and despair –  
hope in a force beyond what our eyes can see.  
And we can carry God's contagious **love** into a worldwide contagion,  
sowing antibodies of transformation and healing right at the heart.

The specifics of all of this are yet to be revealed. I only know this is our moment,  
when we reveal the power of God in the midst of disease and death.  
It's not our power; it's not our wisdom; it's not our savvy –  
it's not even our love, which is limited and fallible.  
It all comes from God. We just need to be willing conduits for this moment.  
When we know "we got nothing," God's power can best be revealed in us.

And God will make God's power known. Through us.  
Are you ready? Amen.

## John 9

**1**As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2**His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

**3**"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, **"but this happened so that the work of God might be revealed in him."**

**4**As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. **5**While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

**6**Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. **7**"Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

**8**His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?"

**9**Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

**10**"How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded.

**11**He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

**12**"Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.

**13**They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. **14**Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. **15**Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

**16**Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided.

**17**Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, **"He is a prophet."**

**18**The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. **19**"Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

**20**"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. **21**But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." **22**His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ[a] would be put out of the synagogue. **23**That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

**24**A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

**25**He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know."

**One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"**

**26**Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

**27**He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

**28**Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! **29**We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

**30**The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. **31**We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. **32****Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33****If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.**"

**34**To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!"  
And they threw him out.

**35**Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said,  
"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

**36**"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

**37**Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

**38****Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.**

**39**Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world,  
**so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."**

**40**Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked,  
"What? Are we blind too?"

**41**Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin;  
but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."