

OUR FINEST HOUR

This past week has been a difficult one. It has been a week of change for most, if not all of us to include challenges and uncertainty that will continue in the weeks ahead. Have you been on a search for toilet paper or hand sanitizer or canned goods? It appears the shelves are empty. We arrived at Costco last Monday and discovered a huge line of people outside the store waiting to enter. Costco was allowing only 20 people to enter the store at one time. Schools, offices, bars, restaurants, and many stores remain closed across major U.S. and European cities, air travel is restricted, and countries are closing their borders. On Friday, my doctor's appointment was via Zoom rather than at the office in Kirkland. Government officials continue to take steps to effectively shut down public interaction to slow the spread of the COVID-19, the illness caused by the virus. Did you ever imagine that Lent would be quite like this in terms of challenges and sacrifice? What does our Gospel lesson have to do with all of this?

"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.'"

Jesus then made the blind man able to see. Once the neighbors realized the blind man could see they did not believe that he was same person. The Pharisees and the Jews did not believe that Jesus had restored the blind man's sight. They also believed Jesus was a sinner because he performed this "miracle" on the Sabbath, and they believed the man was blind because he was a sinner.

Perhaps the man was born blind because it was part of an evil that God had brought to the earth. However, the horrors of the twentieth century, WWI, the Holocaust, use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the shootings in our schools, make it difficult to assume that these events were a part of God's plan.

Another assumption was this man's blindness must be due to someone's sin, either that of the man himself or of his parents. Jesus rejects this explanation and says, "he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

God's presence in the healing of the blind man is revealed to those who are given the gift of faith. The irony of this story is that the blind man receives his sight, but everyone else loses theirs – not their physical vision, but their capacity to believe and understand what they have witnessed. The Pharisees, parents, and neighbors are unable to see that "God does provide". It is having faith in God and the willingness to follow God's direction that enables us to accomplish God's purposes.

Samuel is called to seek a new king for Israel. When Samuel began reviewing Jesse's children for the new king, he found himself confronted by a God who kept telling him again and again, "Not this one." Samuel found himself being asked by God to look

differently, to see the world in a new way. Samuel's first inclination was to see a potential new king in the tallest and strongest of the boys. He went to Jesse who got seven of his sons, but God rejected them all. "...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." Finally, Samuel took the youngest son, anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.

As we reflect the corona virus there are many examples of disbelief, or blindness. Comments such as this whole pandemic thing is exaggerated, only a small percentage of the people will get the virus, or it won't happen to me are examples of "spiritual" blindness.

This year Lent is providing us an opportunity to move from darkness to light. If we can lift our blindness to follow God and what God wants for us. The Pharisees, the neighbors, and the parents were not able to believe, but the blind man knew he had his sight. He "saw the light" both literally and figuratively. What else is there in our lives, besides the corona virus pandemic that we just don't believe? Are we placing our trust in God so that we can see light! Ephesians tells us "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. "

What makes sense out of these is the presence of a God of compassion and love, along with the opportunity to serve. What makes sense out of tragedy is not that we understand it. Instead, it's that God has taken it upon himself, and that God is present in it and through it, and we are called to love God and to love our neighbor in our own pain in order to love, serve, and help our brothers and sisters.

Bishop Curry, in his sermon last week, referred to Tim Parker, a writer and translator who lives in Milan. He wrote a beautiful, helpful, and healing piece in The New York Times titled *This is Life Under Lockdown in Milan, Italy*. "In just two weeks, all the usual certainties have gone. It's been a spiritual exercise in letting go. You paid for season tickets on the subway? Now you realize subway travel is the surest way of getting the disease. You have a subscription to the gym? The gym is closed, so is the cinema, your tickets for concerts and soccer games are useless. Your children can't go to school or university. Even mass is canceled. Everybody is being asked to think, not for themselves, but also for the community.

He continues, "Milan is a fragmented city. There are all kinds of ethnic groups, Chinese, Arabs, Hispanics, Filipinos, Indians, any number of Romanians and Slavs, Italians from every region, but inevitably the virus is bringing on new awareness. An awareness that we all share the same physical space. Milan, Italy. We really live here. We sink or swim together. Perhaps we may even get to know each other albeit without shaking hands. Maybe there is a new spirit of unity."

Maybe love really is the way. God's love, and our lived love for each other. Love can heal and help when nothing else can. Love can lift up and liberate when nothing else will.

This could be our **Finest Hour**. For most people nationwide and worldwide, this virus is not about you. This is one of those times in life, in history, when your actions are about something bigger. Your actions are about someone else, about something greater, a greater good that you may not ever witness. A person you will save who you will never meet. The biggest work you can do is expand your heart and your mind to see yourself and see your family as part of a much bigger community that can have a massive—**hugely massive**—impact on the lives of other people. This is love for each other at work.

You can help by canceling anything that requires a group gathering. You can help by not using the medical system unless it is urgent. You can help by staying home if you are sick. You can help by ordering take-out from your local restaurants. Eat the food yourself or find someone who needs it. You can help by asking yourself, "What can I do?" "What can I offer?" You can help by seeing yourself as part of something bigger than yourself.

Bishop Curry states us for us Christians, what makes sense out of the world's and our suffering is not answers or explanations. Instead, what makes sense out of these is the presence of a God of compassion and love, along with the opportunity to serve. What makes sense out of tragedy is not that we understand it. Instead, it's that God has taken it upon himself, and that God is present in it and through it, and that God calls us to love him, and to serve him, and to find him, in our own pain and in that of our brothers and sisters.

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

God is challenging us and with us. Let this be our **Finest Hour**.

Amen