

Bethel Congregational Church UCC - Ontario California
March 22, 2020 - 4th Sunday of Lent

We Gather

Prelude

Music for Meditation

Sandy Gunn

***Call to Worship (Responsive)**

When the world is dark and full of hate and fear, when we cannot see God
we will turn on the light.

When we cannot find our way back to love and peace
we will turn on the light.

When our vision dims due to the darkness within
we will turn on the light.

Christ opens our eyes with the gift of sight.

The light of the world is Jesus Christ.

Come and worship the one who brings sight to the blind.

Hallelujah! Praise God, the light of the world!

Opening Prayer (Unison)

Gracious God, who created us in God's own image, we are grateful for all that you have done for us, for all that you are doing in us, and for all that you will do through us.

Open our eyes to see your presence among us,
moving in powerful ways at all times and in all places.

Open our ears to hear familiar words in new ways—
ways that will change us and challenge us to become the people you created us to be.

Grant us the power and the courage to come out of the darkness and into the light of Jesus Christ, that we may serve you by serving others. We love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
Amen.

Gathering Hymn

Precious Lord Take My Hand

NCH#472

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn
Through the storm, through the night
Lead me on to the light
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home

When my way grows drear, precious Lord, linger near
When my life is almost gone,
Hear my cry, hear my call
Hold my hand lest I fall
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home

When the darkness appears, and the night draws near
And the day is past and gone
At the river I stand
Guide my feet, hold my hand
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home; Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home

We Proclaim /God Is Still Speaking

Welcome & Greetings

Special Music

Deanna Morrison

Children's Time

***Gloria**

Glory to the Creator
The Christ, the Holy Spirit Three in One
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be
World without end, Amen, Amen.

Psalm 23

God is my shepherd, I shall not want.
God makes me lie down in green pastures, and leads me beside still waters;
God restores my soul and leads me in right paths for the sake of God's name.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff-- they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of God my whole life long.

Gospel Reading

John 9:1-41

As he 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." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The 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?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man."

But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He 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." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then 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." Some 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. So 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."

The 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 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but 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."

His 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. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So 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." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He 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?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped him. Jesus 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." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

Sermon

"Opening our Eyes"

Rev. Dr. Sylvia Lee Mann

We Respond/Supporting God's Mission

Invitation to the Offering

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Prayer of Dedication

Unison

God of light and love and peace, we praise your name for leading us in paths of righteousness, that we may come into your presence, forgiven and free. We give you thanks for guiding us to this place: where we may rest beside the still waters of your grace, where we are filled with the good gifts of your goodness and mercy. We worship you with all that we are, and we bless your name for all that we will be as we continue on our journey—

a journey that leads us to your kingdom, where we will dwell with you forever.

We offer you these gifts, that you might bless them and send them out into the valley of the shadow of death, and everywhere in need of your light. Amen.

Unison Prayer of Confession

Forgiving God, in a world filled with so much pain, we would rather shut our eyes and be blind than see things as they really are. Grant us the courage to face the reality of our world, and give us the strength to bring your light to those who walk in darkness.

Help us see others as you see them, and forgive us when we do not trust you enough to open our eyes to the possibilities before us. Heal our self-inflicted blindness, O God, and lead us in the footsteps of the Light of the World, who reveals your glory in his life, his teachings, and his love. In his holy name, we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance

The Lord's Prayer 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 debts,
 as we forgive our debtors
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

We are Sent/Being The Church

***Singing into Mission**

Sanctuary

Lord prepare me, to be a sanctuary
Pure and holy, tried and true
With thanksgiving,
I'll be a living Sanctuary, for you.

Benediction

Lord, give us such sight, that we may see the many ways of serving you by helping others. Help us bring sight to others who dwell in deep darkness. AMEN.

Postlude

For further reflection:

When we see clearly, our lives are transformed.

But seeing God clearly, recognizing Christ, and perceiving the anointing of God requires the work and light of the Holy Spirit.

When we have the light of the Spirit, we see God and understand things more fully, we see others with the eyes of Christ.

God does not value us for what we look like. God sees into our hearts and knows what we feel and believe. Anyone can be called by God to achieve greatness. And everyone is cared for by the Good Shepherd, who gives us all that we need. For we are all "children of light," created by the One who is light, and in whom there is no darkness at all.

Yet, we are also all blind and in need of healing so that we might be the sight of God, clear and undistorted by our sin, our hurts, our agendas, and our prejudices.

The light of the world shines, and the darkness that is in the world has not overcome it—not in our individual lives, not in our collective lives, not in the history of the world as a whole.

The light will not be extinguished. We must let it shine through us!