

Lent 4



March 10, 2002

Prayer of the Day

God of all mercy, by your power to heal and to forgive, graciously cleanse us from all sin and make us strong; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

1 Samuel 16:1-13

{1} The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." {2} Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'" {3} Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." {4} Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" {5} He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. {6} When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the LORD." {7} But 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." {8} Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." {9} Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." {10} Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." {11} Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." {12} He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." {13} Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

1. *I have rejected him from being king over Israel:* See 1 Samuel 15:26. Saul has been rejected, so now David will be anointed.

Jesse the Bethlehemite: Jesse was from the tribe of Judah, a grandson of Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 4:17-22; 1 Chronicles 2:3-12). Bethlehem was about 6 miles south of Jerusalem.

2. *If Saul hears of it, he will kill me:* However, we already know from 15:35 that Samuel died without seeing Saul again. In 1 Samuel 28:7-20 Saul prevails upon a "ghostwife" to raise up the spirit of Samuel after his death.

6-10. *Eliab...Abinadab...Shammah...seven of his sons:* The text implies that David had seven brothers (see also 1 Samuel 17:12). 1 Chronicles 27:18 which mentions Elihu as a seventh brother. However, 1 Chronicles 2:13-15 identifies David as Jesse's seventh son.

12. *The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one:* David is sent for and Samuel is instructed to anoint him.

13. *Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him:* This is the horn of oil Yahweh instructed him to fill in verse 1. Anointing with oil confers a specific status on a person. Kings, priests, prophets are anointed to identify them with their office.

and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward: The spirit of Yahweh left Saul (see the next verse) and now "rushed" upon David. "The 'spirit of Yahweh' (*ruah yahweh*, more properly the 'breath of Yahweh') refers in such a situation

to the vital force of the deity, that is, to the invigorating power of God as experienced by a human being." [1]

Samuel...went to Ramah: This was Samuel's childhood home (1 Samuel 1:19-20).

Psalm 23

{1} The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. {2} He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; {3} he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. {4} 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. {5} You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. {6} Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

Traditionally Psalm 23 is attributed to David. The psalm itself indicates that the singer has been anointed with oil and dwells in the Temple, "the house of the Lord." The trust expressed by the psalmist would be appropriate for one who has been anointed as King of Israel, and with the spirit of the Lord.

1. *The LORD is my shepherd*: The image of Yahweh as the shepherd of Israel is common in the Old Testament beginning with Genesis 49:24. (See also Psalm 79:13; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:15ff. In the ancient Near East a king is characterized as a shepherd. The imagery of shepherd and sheep dominates the song: green pastures, still waters, rod and staff, but other images are also used: he restores my soul, you prepare a table, my enemies, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows, goodness and mercy shall follow me.

2-3: The very careful poetic structure of the Psalm is based on parallelism between the lines of the poem and the relationship of metaphor to declaration. The meaning of the parallels is made explicit in the last line.

He makes me lie down in green pastures

He leads me beside still waters

He restores my soul

He leads me in right paths

*for his name's
sake*

4-5. *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.

4. *the darkest valley*: In the Gospel, Jesus says he is the light of the world. As that light he enlightens even the darkest valleys.

5. *you anoint my head with oil*: See the notes on 1 Samuel 16. The singer is an anointed person; the king?

6. *goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life
in the house of the Lord I shall dwell my whole life long*

I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long: The Temple in Jerusalem was the royal sanctuary, it was the King's Temple. The people had access to it only by permission.

"The background of the psalm of trust represents a definite danger. The petitioner has enemies, his life is threatened and persecuted. But in the Temple, in the community of

Yahweh, [*tov vehesed*] ["goodness and mercy"] has met the one persecuted. Now he knows that he is sheltered in the protective power of the [*shem*] [name].... the petitioner knows that his life is always sheltered and surrounded by well-being. [2]

Ephesians 5:8-14

{8} For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— {9} for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. {10} Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. {11} Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. {12} For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; {13} but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, {14} for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

14. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." "It" is possibly a quotation from a baptismal hymn. [3]

The Ephesians have been marked with a seal in baptism and admonished to become imitators of God. The second lesson anticipates the theme of light and seeing. Christ (Messiah) is the light of the world, and will shine on you. We are encouraged to live as children of light and to shun the unfruitful works of darkness.

John 9:1-41

{1} As he walked 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} Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. {4} We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. {5} As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." {6} 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, {7} saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. {8} 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?" {9} Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." {10} But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" {11} 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." {12} They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." {13} They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. {14} Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. {15} 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." {16} 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. {17} 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." {18} 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 {19} and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" {20} His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; {21} 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." {22} 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. {23} Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." {24} 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." {25} He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." {26} They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" {27} 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?" {28} Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. {29} We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." {30} The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. {31} We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who

worships him and obeys his will. {32} Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. {33} If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." {34} They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. {35} Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" {36} He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." {37} Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." {38} He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. {39} 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." {40} Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" {41} Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

1. a man blind from birth: See verse 32. This is a signal of the improbability, of the story which is about to unfold. Things do not happen as we may expect them to. God has surprises in store for us.

3: The option is either to deconstruct the text to fit our contemporary sense of what is appropriate and acceptable in God, or to understand the declaration as it would have been understood in the first century. The point of the verse is that the man's blindness is not a consequence of sin. "That the readers could have felt this explanation to be inhuman (a man has to suffer the agony of blindness for many years, in order that the power of God may be manifest in his healing) does not enter into the meaning of the story for the narrator...." [4] The man was born blind; the purpose of his blindness at this point is to reveal God's grace and power.

5. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world: Jesus is the true light... coming into the world (1:9). The miracle will make this clear.

6-7: The restoration of the man's sight consists of two parts: a) Jesus makes mud with saliva, spreads it on the man's eyes and tells him to wash in the pool of Siloam, b) the man washes and can see. The first action is similar to the healing in Mark 8:23, where Jesus puts saliva on a blind man's eyes. Apparently the use of saliva was common enough as a therapeutic method to require regulation. [5] The second part is similar to Elijah's healing of the leprous Naaman who washed in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:10). The connection of a creative act with earth (dust/mud) is reminiscent of the Yahwist's creation story (Genesis 2:7).

13-17: Some Pharisees decide that Jesus cannot be from God because he does not observe the sabbath (in the way the Pharisees did), but others thought that a sinner could not have restored the man's sight.

14. it was a sabbath day: In 5:9 Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. The Judeans began to persecute Jesus at that time because he healed on the Sabbath (5:16). In Matthew 12:11 Jesus argues that since a sheep would be rescued on the Sabbath and a human being is more valuable than a sheep, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Here the issue for Jesus is not the meaning of the law, but his identity, so he does not make an issue of it.

16. How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?: In 3:2 Nicodemus says, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." The Pharisees knew that signs could only be done by God's will. That they refuse to accept Jesus' sign is an willful act of rejection.

18-23: The man's parents confirm that he was indeed blind from birth.

22: anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue: This is generally understood to reflect the split between the synagogue and the church. [6]

29. we know: Contrast with Nicodemus' "we know" in 3:2 (An interesting study would be the "we know" passages in John. Among them are the following in chapter 9: 20-21, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind;" 24, "We know that this man is a sinner;" 29, "We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from;" 31, "We know that God does not listen to sinners."

35-38: Jesus talks with the man and elicits a statement of faith, and an act of worship.

39. I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind: In John Jesus denies that he acts as a judge (3:17; 8:15;

12:47). People judge themselves by whether or not they believe in him (3:36; See also Mark 16:16).

39-41: The Pharisees object to being called blind (verse 39). Jesus tells them that if they were blind they would have an excuse: "...now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains." "...because you claim that you see, that is, that you know God, and do not recognize him, for you there is no forgiveness of sin." [7]

The irony is that, although sin did not account for the man's blindness, the Pharisees' claim to see *is* sin. The danger of their sin is not only the peril to themselves, but also the risk their vision posed for those who might be tempted to claim it for their own. Those who are clearly blind are easy to resist, but those whose visions of comfort or calamity correspond to our hopes and fears may easily seduce us. Like the man born blind we must put our trust in Jesus only, and in his vision of reality alone. In John signs point to deeper reality: "...these [signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name (20:30-31)."

Reflection

The image that recurs in the lessons is that of anointing. David is anointed with oil by Samuel. A Davidic king who would restore the kingdom of Judah came to be known as the Messiah in Hebrew (*Christos* in Greek). The Psalmist (the King?) is also anointed. In the Gospel Jesus is Messiah. Christ (the Messiah or anointed one) will shine upon you. The withdrawal of Yahweh's spirit from Saul was the consequence of Saul's failure to fulfill his commission. In the Gospel the Pharisees will not see that Jesus is the light of the world. Samuel's fear of Saul foreshadows the fear of the parents of the blind man; those who go against authority expect dire consequences.

The lessons for the Fourth Sunday of Lent remind us that Jesus is the light of the world, and that our destiny is determined by the love of God who sent him as our Savior. While there is nothing we can do to merit God's love and mercy, we can reject it, by refusing to receive Jesus in faith. We are to live as children of the light, seeking what is good and right and true. We are not to rely on those who claim to have authority in matters of faith, but whose vision contradicts that of Jesus, even if they have power to exclude us from earthly manifestations of the kingdom.

Hymns [8]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).
E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

400 --E--God, Whose Almighty 94 --D--My Song is Love 702s --P--Psalm 23: Shepherd 816s --II--I Want to 396 --II--O God, O Lord 745v --II--Awake, O Sleeper (813s)	649v --II--I Want to Walk 728v --II--O Light Whose 435 --G--God, Whose 776v --G--Be Thou My Vision 426, 431, 448, 481
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Prayers of the People [9]

P or A: Refresh us, Good Shepherd, as we come to you praying "Hear us, O God," and responding, "Your mercy is great."

A: That all theologians and pastors, teachers and bishops, would be open to your Word. Give us all teachable moments when we learn more deeply who you are and what we are

to be, hear us, O God, Your mercy is great.

A: Select leaders of unexpected strength and courage to lead the nations to peace. Teach our leaders to depend on you and to know your wisdom. Hear us, O God, Your mercy is great.

A: That we all may live in the light, producing fruit in our life because of your light. Give us courage to expose the works of darkness. Let Christ shine among us. Hear us, O God, Your mercy is great.

A: You are compassionate to those in need. Bring healing to our sick and grieving that the work of God may be revealed in them, especially we remember _____. Hear us, O God, Your mercy is great.

A: Help us to honour your prophets, gracious God. May we never close our ears and our hearts to them or any other witness of your Word. Hear us, O God, Your mercy is great.

P: Heal our blindness and bring us light. We ask for all these things and whatever else you may see that we need in the name of Jesus, the light of all. Amen.

Or [10]

Presider or deacon

Christ anointed the eyes of the man born blind. As we prepare for the paschal feast, let us earnestly beseech God to give new sight to all peoples everywhere.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy catholic church throughout the world, sharing the death and resurrection of Christ.

For N our bishop, for presbyters and deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For NN our catechumen(s) and NN their sponsors(s).

For all nations, peoples, tribes, clans, and families.

For justice, mercy, and peace in all the world.

For all who are sick, afflicted, or oppressed.

For the dying and the dead.

For our families, friends, and companions, and for all those we love.

Presider

Blessed are you, God of Samuel and David, who gives us the light of the world in Jesus the Anointed One. Receive the prayers we offer this day for those in need in every place and anoint the head of all who come to your table. Glory to you for ever and ever.

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Notes

[1] P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980, p. 182.

[2] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 309.

[3] See the discussion in Marcus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974, p.574ff.

[4] Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 7-21*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, p. 37.

[5] In the Talmud there is a prohibition against reciting charms over wounds and for reciting the verse, Ex. 15:26. One will lose his share in the World to come if he spits as he recites the verse, for the offensive part is the spitting. Judah Goldin, "The Magic of Magic and Superstition," *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, (ed. by E.S. Fiorenza), pp. 120f.

[6] Louis J. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, New York: Harper &

Row, Publishers, 1968, pp. 31-41.

[7] Haenchen, *Ibid.*, p. 41.

[8] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rcla9899.txt>

[9] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_a2.txt

[10] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>