**Lent: *A Call to Commitment***

**Sunday March 22, 2020**

**Lent #4: “Seeing the Light” (John 9:1-41)**

 Light and darkness; night and day; sunset and dawn; the marking of our days according to sun is deeply ingrained within us. The cycle of daylight and darkness shapes our natural responses to our world. Whether you’re a morning person or not, you still enjoy the warmth of the morning sun on your face. And even people who are night owls still get a little scared when they hear strange noises in a darkened house.

 The language and symbolism of light and darkness also shapes our perspective on the circumstances that touch our lives. It would not be an understatement to say that we are living through some very dark times right now. In the words of Isaiah the prophet, we are the “*people walking in darkness*” (Isaiah 9:2). Reflecting on Isaiah’s words, Frederick Buechner writes:

“IN ONE RESPECT if in no other this metaphor of Isaiah's is a very relevant one for us and our age because we are also, God knows, a people who walk in darkness. There seems little need to explain. If darkness is meant to suggest a world where nobody can see very well—either themselves, or each other, or where they are heading, or even where they are standing at the moment; if darkness is meant to convey a sense of uncertainty, of being lost, of being afraid; if darkness suggests conflict, conflict between races, between nations, between individuals each pretty much out for himself when you come right down to it; then we live in a world that knows much about darkness. Darkness is what our newspapers are about. Darkness is what most of our best contemporary literature is about. Darkness fills the skies over our own cities no less than over the cities of our enemies. And in our single lives, we know much about darkness too. If we are people who pray, darkness is apt to be a lot of what our prayers are about. If we are people who do not pray, it is apt to be darkness in one form or another that has stopped our mouths” (<https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2017/10/3/darkness>).

 Buechner’s words are especially fitting for these days. The news tries to offer both hope and caution, but the overall impact paints a rather sad picture for us. Added to this are the drastic changes that have been made to our daily lives. The normal places where we gather to connect with other people – homes, churches, workplaces, schools, libraries, skating rinks, parks, restaurants and neighbourhood spots – have closed. Celebrations and festive gatherings have been cancelled. Social distancing has led to a real sense of isolation as we are physically cordoned off from each other. We don’t know when all of this will end or what further impact it will have on our lives. Every week I look forward to the many opportunities I have to talk face-to-face with several of you. All of us receive strength and comfort from gathering together to worship and pray. But for the sake of others and ourselves we can’t do this right now.

 Walking through these dark times, we might feel a bit like the blind man in John chapter 9. Blind from birth he never experienced the sight of the sunlight upon his world. Living in darkness, all he could do was sit and beg or stumble around the town (John 9:1, 8). We are currently living in the darkness of uncertainty, disorientation, and fear. We are people sitting in darkness. But Isaiah emphasizes that the people sitting darkness, “*have seen a great light, on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned*” (Isaiah 9:2).

 Jesus said, “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*” (John 8:12). John begins his Gospel with these words, “*In him (Jesus) was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*” (John 1:4-5). The light and life that Jesus brings was about to impact the life of the man born blind.

 When Jesus and his disciples first observed the man sitting and begging, the disciples began to speculate about who was to blame for the man’s blindness (John 9:2). But Jesus took a very different approach; he got right to work and brought God’s light into the man’s gloomy situation. Responding to the disciples’ question, he declared, “*You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world’s Light*” (John 9:3-5). Jesus, the light of the world, took every opportunity to do God’s work and he calls each one of us to do the same.

 After making a healing mudpack with his saliva and some dirt, he spread it on the man’s eyes and instructed him to go and wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam (John 9:6-7). The blind man did as Jesus commanded him and his sight was miraculously restored (John 9:7). He could see sunshine for the very first time in his life. To some of the townsfolk this event so unbelievable that they doubted that it was the same man (John 9:8-9).

 The restoration of the man’s sight was a concrete expression of Jesus as the light of the world. Jesus brought real light into his life. But “the transition from physical blindness to sight was only a precursor to the ultimate journey from spiritual blindness to the light of belief” (Kevin Quast, *Reading the Gospel of John,* p. 75). At the beginning the man didn’t even know where Jesus was (John 9:12). But at the story’s climax, he confessed his belief in Jesus and worshipped him (John 9:38). Jesus the light of the world opened the man’s eyes and his heart. In these difficult days, we’re praying for the light of Jesus to shine in our world.

 My prayer for each one of you is that the light of Jesus would shine into your lives in very concrete ways, that amidst the stress, isolation, anxiety and fear you would receive comfort from God and others. If you are stuck at home with your family, I pray that this time would blessed as you share meals, have conversations, listen to music, play games and talk. If you all alone, I pray that this time would be blessed as you talk on the phone, write emails, and find creative ways to connect with people. For everyone, use this time to connect with God, to pray, read Scripture, and silently listen to God. Let God’s light transform the darkness that surrounds us.

 Over the past week, I’ve noticed a particular post on Facebook that says, “With church doors closing, it is time for us to show that the church has never been about the building. We are the church!” While I share the sentiment of this post, I am left with the question, *how?* How can we be the church when we need to avoid gathering with others? How can we be the church when even going to the grocery store poses risks for others and ourselves? I must admit that I’m finding it a challenge to be your pastor in times like these.

 While we can’t gather together for worship, we can worship in our homes, using resources like the one I put together for today. While we can’t talk to our sisters and brothers face-to-face, we can pick up the phone, sent an email, write a text, connect on Skype or sent a Facebook message. While we can’t gather together for prayer, maybe we can use Zoom to have a virtual gathering. Phone calls, Internet technology and social media can’t replace person-to-person contact, but at this time they are the best means to express our care for and connection to each other. Social distancing should not keep us from sharing a spiritual closeness with each other.

 We can also use this time to reach out to our neighbours, especially the elderly and vulnerable. The other day Sherri and I were out walking our dog Tucker and we met up with Paul, one of our neighbours. While keeping safe social distance, we had a lengthy conversation and the subject of toilet paper came up. Paul asked us if we had enough T.P. and we admitted that we were running out but were okay for a little while longer. When the conversation ended, we continued our walk and as we were nearing our driveway, Paul came driving down the street in his pickup, rolled down the window and handed me a bag with two rolls of T.P. This act of kindness restored my faith in humanity! We can do similar things for our neighbours. In these dark times we are called to do the work of God and bring a little light into the world.

 Finally, we can use these times to grow closer to God. We can pray, read Scripture, listen to praise music and receive comfort and strength from God. At times like these we need to have faith in God.

 *May Jesus, the Light of the world be with you.*

 *May his light guide us through these dark days.*