**Solidarity with Sisters’ Communal Prayer**

**MARCH 19, 2023 Fourth Sunday of Lent**

*"How did Jesus open your eyes?"*

*(John 9)*

**HELLOs,** then Zoom host mutes everyone. **(Suzie De Quattro & Betty Thompson)**

**WELCOME (Terri Butel)**

Welcome, everyone!

* I am Terri Butel and I prepared our prayer for today.
* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Thanks to the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer today: Sr. Jacqueline Quinn, Mary Dolmage, Cecilia Estrada, Debra Street, Ann Jelen, Debbie Ballard, Kathy Heller, Norb Bufka and Judith Galleazzi.
* We are always looking for new readers and grateful for all readers. We hope some of you will get in touch or put your email into Chat for Judy Sholes for Palm Sunday, Ann Jelen for Holy Thursday, and Alicia Urban for Easter.

**SETTLING IN (Debbie Ballard)**

We are not all in the same place, but we can still be together by sharing a common breath.  So let us begin by slowly taking one collective breath together - in and out.   With each breath let the Spirit of God settle deeper into you. Let your breath carry away tensions from your body and distractions from your mind.  In and out.   Now let’s take 3 more breaths.  One to be here…one to be together…and one to make space for the Spirit to act in you.

Now **Mary Dolmage & Cecilia Estrada** will lead us into our prayer together.

**OPENING RITUAL** **(****Mary Dolmage & Cecilia Estrada)**

God of our deserts, God of our transformation, God of our fruitfulness, God of all who forget you and all who return to you, God of all who hope for new life, we are here to listen to you.

Leader: Beloved Community, Lent calls us to return to Yahweh with all our heart.

All: O God, we hear you calling.

Leader: Beloved Community, we begin just where we are.

All: O God, we hear you calling.

Leader: Holy One, you appeal to us for justice, peace, and communion for all creation!

All: O God, we hear you calling.

Leader: “Lent is a call to weep for what we could have been and are not. Lent is the grace to grieve for what we should have done and did not. Lent is the opportunity to change what we ought to change but have not…. Lent is about becoming, doing and changing whatever it is that is blocking the fullness of life in us right now.” (Joan Chittister, OSB)

Let us pause and reflect on what is blocking us, or maybe even protecting us, from being tugged into the unknown magnificence of resurrection.

[*Pause about 15 seconds – about 2 slow deep breaths.]*

Leader: Let us pray together:

All (muted):

I ask you, my sisters and brothers, to pray for me to our God.

Holy One, accept my deep sorrow for ways in which I participate in the brokenness of your world -- in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and what I have failed to do.

Thank you for your endless love for me, and for your forgiveness that comes even before I ask.

Help me to forgive myself.

Strengthen me to take an active part in bringing your grace to the world, in the company of all your children, all the saints, and all the Earth. Amen.

Leader: Terri Butel will now introduce us to today’s theme.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME**  **(Terri Butel)**

Today’s theme is seeing – seeing reality and striving to see as God sees. This deepening of vision isn’t a cheap transformation, as the young anointed David and the person blind from birth will learn. This shortened Gospel does not include all that precedes the healed blind man’s dismissal from his faith community. Those missing verses tell how he was grilled by the Temple authorities and his parents’ fear of them and ultimate abandonment of their child.

***How bewildering***. Imagine the overwhelming experience of finally seeing all you had missed, trying to understand it and wanting to sing from the mountaintops – and finding yourself more separated than ever because of a rule about Sabbath rest and the burgeoning political agenda to frame Jesus. (Long pause)

Debra Street will read from the 1st book of Samuel. Sr. Jacqueline Quinn will offer questions for your reflection, followed by silence. Feel free to stay with whatever question calls you.

**READING 1 1 Sm 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a** **(Debra Street)**

YHWH said to Samuel:  
"Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way.  
I am sending you to Jesse in Bethlehem,  
for I have chosen my ruler from among his children."  
  
When they arrived,   
Samuel saw Eliab and said to himself,  
"Surely God's anointed stands here before YHWH."  
But YHWH said to Samuel:  
"Pay no attention to appearance and height.YHWH does not see as mortals see;  
mortals see only appearances  
but YHWH sees into the heart."  
Seven sons were presented to Samuel by Jesse, who said  
"YHWH has not chosen any of these. Are these all the sons you have?"  
"There is still the youngest,” Jesse said, “but he is tending the sheep."  
Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until the lad arrives."  
So they sent for the boy, a ruddy youth with bright eyes, and handsome to behold.  
YHWH said, "Rise and anoint this one."  
Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed the boy in the presence of his brothers,  
and from that day forward the spirit of YHWH came upon David and was with him.

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS (Sr. Jacqueline Quinn)**

*[Take a full breath after each question.]*

How was it for you when you were unexpectedly chosen for leadership?

What young future leader might you anoint with your prayer and encouragement?

**COMMUNAL REFLECTION** (**Terri:** Slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

(Terri):Next, Kathy Heller will read to us from the Gospel of John.



**READING 2 JN 9:1-3, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38 (Kathy Heller)**

As Jesus walked along, he saw someone who had been blind from birth.

The disciples asked Jesus, "Rabbi, was it this individual’s sin that caused the blindness, or that of the parents?"

"Neither,” answered Jesus, “It wasn’t because of anyone’s sin - not this person nor the parents’. Rather, it was to let God’s works shine forth.”

With that, Jesus spat on the ground, made mud with his saliva and smeared the blind one’s eyes with the mud. Then Jesus said, “Go wash in the pool of Siloam." “Siloam” means “sent.” So the person went off to wash, and came back able to see.

Neighbors and those who had been accustomed to seeing the blind beggar began to ask,

"Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?" Some said yes; others said no – the one who had been healed simply looked like the beggar. But the individual in question said, "No – it was me."

They took the one who had been born blind to the Pharisees. It had been on a Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud paste and opened this one’s eyes. The Pharisees asked how the individual could see. They were told, "Jesus put mud on my eyes. I washed it off, and now I can see."

This prompted some of the Pharisees to say, "This Jesus cannot be from God, because he doesn’t keep the Sabbath.” Others argued, "But how could a sinner perform signs like these?" They were sharply divided.

Then they addressed the blind person again, "Since it was your eyes he opened, what do you have to say about this Jesus?” "He’s a prophet," came the reply.

"What! You’re steeped in sin from birth, and you’re giving us lectures?" With that they threw the person out.

When Jesus heard of the expulsion, he sought out the healed one and asked, “Do you believe in the Chosen One?"

The other answered, "Who is this one, that I may believe?"

"You’re looking at him,” Jesus replied. “The Chosen One is speaking to you now.”

The healed one said, "Yes, I believe," and worshiped Jesus.

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS (Sr. Jacqueline Quinn)**

*[Take a full breath after each question.]*

When have you been rejected or feared rejection because you gained new sight?

When have you rejected someone because of what they were able to see?

What compassionate thoughts can you have for the Pharisees in this story?

**COMMUNAL REFLECTION** (**Terri:** Slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

(Terri:): Now Ann Jelen will read from a reflection by Mary McGlone.

**READING 3 Reflection by Mary McGlone (Ann Jelen)**

We begin about 1,000 years before the time of Christ with God's surprising choice of the boy David to be Israel's king. In a society that prized the firstborn, warriors and wise men, Samuel had to accept and defend God's choice of a mere kid to be secretly anointed as successor to Saul.

The choice of David and the statement that God sees differently than we do is the setup for the story of the healing of the person born blind. Now the core question is, "What are we supposed to see?"

In John’s Gospel, the disciples ask Jesus if the person’s blindness is punishment for sin, a common belief at that time. Jesus adjusted their perspective, explaining that God doesn't see things as human beings do and that the person's condition would show forth the works of God.

It's hard to imagine this person's experience of new sight. It's a wonderful thing to see, but sight required a total reorientation to "live in the light." The ultimate revelation was that the healer, God’s Chosen, was doing God’s work.

This Sunday, we can't help but hear this Gospel as an invitation to scrutinize our perspectives, sort through our presuppositions and see what should be discarded and what new insights might be hidden in unexpected, even unwanted places. Especially for us, many years after we were “washed clean” in Baptism, how might we be clinging to long-held perspectives, resisting even miracles? True, choosing to try to learn God's perspective will cause great disorientation, but the option is to choose self-imposed blindness.

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS (Sr. Jacqueline Quinn)**

*[Take a full breath after each question.]*

How have you collaborated with Jesus in your own healing?

What “self-imposed blindness” is it hard for you to give up?

What miracle might you be missing because of your long-held perspectives?

**COMMUNAL REFLECTION** (**Terri:** Slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.**)**

**SHARING (Sr. Jacqueline Quinn)**

We invite you to share the essence that emerged in **your** heart this morning as you have reflected upon our reading and music. We welcome everyone who wants to speak, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening.

So let’s begin in silence as we gather our reflections. [Long-ish pause]

Now who would like to start our sharing? Remember to unmute yourself to speak and mute yourself again afterwards.

[Sharing]

[If there is silence more than about 30 seconds before anyone speaks:] Take whatever quiet you need before you speak.

[If there is extended silence during the sharing:] Is there anyone else who would like to share?  *[Pause for a slow, deep breath.]*

[Stop by about 20 minutes after the hour.]

Thank you.  Let us pause for a minute of silence to hold all that has been said, and to notice what is rising in us in response. [Long pause.] We can continue after the final song, as we often do.

Holding onto what the Holy One is saying, we turn to God in prayer.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY(Mary Dolmage & Cecilia Estrada)**

Our response today will be: **God of healing and hope, hear our prayer.**

For the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, who bravely shine light and serve in the darkened corners of our world, encourage and affirm them as they inspire us, we pray… **God of healing and hope, hear our prayer.**

For discernment, that we may see and speak the truth, we pray … **God of healing and hope, hear our prayer.**

Twenty years ago today, President George W. Bush launched the Iraq War based upon false intelligence about the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction. For an end to all wars and state-sanctioned violence, especially in Ukraine, Sudan, Haiti, and the United States, we pray, **God of healing and hope, hear our prayer.**

That all leaders – government, Church, corporate, family – may not waste nor abuse their leadership, we pray… **God of healing and hope, hear our prayer.**

For what else shall we pray? Please unmute yourself to speak, and mute yourself afterwards.

(Wait for individuals to offer shared prayers) … we pray, **God of healing and hope, hear our prayer.**

O You who love us more than we can imagine, we are grateful for this chance to give you our prayers, spoken and unspoken. We entrust the outcome to you. Amen.

**OFFERTORY (Debbie Ballard)**

Holy One, we bring you ourselves knowing you accept us just as we are and forgive us before we forgive ourselves.

We pause in silence to reflect on our Lenten intention *(long pause)* – how did I live it this last week?

We turn again to you and ask - In what specific way am I hearing your call to me for this coming week? *(Long pause)*

Holy One, we offer our whole selves to you, all that we have and all that we are. We pray that you will help us to be bold in our mission and in our witness. May we who have been given so much, give to others in need, support those who suffer or mourn, give peace to those in trouble, work for unity in our world and love our neighbor as Jesus taught us. Blessed Be!

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Debra Street)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

to know that you trust us to be your body in this world.

We are part of that body as we let go of all that separates us from you,

and as we embrace one another and your entire creation with merciful love.

We give you thanks for your presence in and among us.  *[Pause.]*

We remember the night before Jesus died.

At dinner with friends, Jesus knew all that would soon be asked of them,

and, loving them to the end, Jesus showed them how to care for each other

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet

and said, “… as I have done for you, you should also do.”

Then he looked at what was in front of them, the bread and the wine,

gifts of Earth and the work of human hands, and blessed them.

So let us, too, invite God right now into what is front and center in our lives

knowing that God will indeed enter what we offer – and bless it.  *[Pause.]*

Let us know God within ourselves so that we become God’s living presence in our world. [Pause.]

Holy One, we entrust ourselves to you and to one another.

Make us your bread of abundance.  Make us your wine of joy.

Let even our fragments be plenty to share.

Blessed be.

To extend our communion Norb Bufka will lead us in the Prayer of Jesus.

**THE PRAYER OF JESUS (Norb Bufka)**

Now let us join our hearts as if we could join our hands to pray in harmony with our family throughout the world:

**All (muted)**:

Our Father, our Mother, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and do not let us fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Come swiftly Mother, Father, come. For yours is the power and the glory and the mercy. Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING (Judith Galleazzi)**

A Blessing of Mud

We trust that the Holy One is healing our sight…

Lest we think the blessing is not in the dirt.

Lest we think the blessing is not in the spit.

Lest we think God cannot reach deep into the things of the earth,

Cannot bring forth the blessing that shimmers within the sludge, cannot anoint us with a tender and grimy grace.

Lest we think God will not use the ground to give us life again, to cleanse us of our unseeing, to open our eyes upon this ordinary and stunning world.

May it be so! Amen.

**CLOSING SONG River of Glory**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8\_4Rcy2oJI**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8_4Rcy2oJI)

River of glory, springs of our birth,

Flood of God's riches poured on the earth.

We are born from the darkness

And clothed in the light!

We are bathed in the glory of God!

Fountain of mercy,

Grace flowing free,

Streams of salvation,

Spilling with love from a tree!

River of glory, springs of our birth,

Flood of God's riches poured on the earth.

We are born from the darkness

And clothed in the light!

We are bathed in the glory of God!

Here there is haven,

Healing and health,

Joy for the asking,

Love in abundance of wealth!

River of glory, springs of our birth,

Flood of God's riches poured on the earth.

We are born from the darkness

And clothed in the light!

We are bathed in the glory of God!

**RESOURCES**

* Opening Ritual – “Lent is a call…” quote from Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister: <http://rosemarieberger.com/2011/03/15/joan-chittister-lent-is-a-chance-to-grieve/>
* First and second reading from The Inclusive Bible.
* Third reading adapted from Mary McGlone’s Fourth Sunday of Lent reflection, <https://www.ncronline.org/march-19-2023-fourth-sunday-lent>
* Petition about Iraq war, “On this day”: <https://www.britannica.com/on-this-day/March-19>
* Final Blessing adapted from “Blessing of Mud”, Jan Richardson, **Circle of Grace**.
* Closing song: River of Glory, Dan Schutte, OCP.
* Image 1: https://thebiblespeakstoyou.com/081-why-did-jesus-spit-on-blind-man/
* Image 2: Václav Mánes - Healing the Blind Man.jpg