



KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

*Captivated by the vision of the realm of God,
made known in Jesus, given in grace*

10am – Sunday 22 March 2020

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Pre service music

“Praeludium”

“L'amour a ses souffrances”

“The Quest for love”

Johann Krieger (1651-1735)

Flor Peeters (1903-86)

Mons Leidvin Takle (b. 1942)

We are prepared for worship, led by our choir

“Surely, surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” from *‘The Messiah’*

G F Handel (1685-1759)

We are invited to worship

Kia noho a Ihowa ki a koutou. May God be with you.

Ma Ihowa koe e manaaki. May God bless you.

We sing

(Halley) CH4 452 - Colin Gibson

1 Great ring of light, true circle with no ending;
clear beam so bright, whose purpose knows no bending;
O Word of God, in darkness always shining out.

2 A man who cried, up on a cross at Calvary;
for him who died, an empty tomb, a mystery;
O risen Christ, all pain and loss transcending.

3 Immortal fire of love forever yearning;
flame of desire for our salvation burning;
Spirit divine, our friend, and present comforter.

4 The light shines still, the eternal Word has spoken;
on Calvary's hill the power of death is broken;
and I receive the life, the joy, the loving.

We pray and are assured of God's great love

E te whanau, in Christ we are forgiven. **Thanks be to God.**

We share the peace of Christ

Kia tau tonu te rangimarie o te Ariki ki a koutou; The peace of Christ be with you all.

And also with you.

Our choir leads us in praying

"Down to the River to Pray"

African American Spiritual circa 1835 anon, arr. Marcello Noia

We converse

We sing

1 Be thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art;
thou my best thought in the day or the
night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

2 Be thou my Wisdom, be thou my true
Word;
I ever with thee, and thou with me, Lord;
thou my great Father: thine own I would
be;
thou in me dwelling, and I one with Thee.

3 Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the
fight;
be thou my dignity, thou my delight,
thou my soul's shelter, and thou my high
tower;
raise thou me heavenward, O Power of my
power.

(Slane) CH4 465 - Irish 8thC, trans. Mary Elizabeth Byrne
4 Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty
praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always;
thou, and thou only, the first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my treasure thou art.

5 High King of Heaven, after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright
heaven's sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

We listen for God's Word

John 9:1-41

9:1 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.

9:2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

9:3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.

9:4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.

9:5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

9:6 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,

9:7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

9:8 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?"

9:9 Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man."

9:10 But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"

9:11 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."

9:12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

9:13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

9:14 Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

9:15 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."

9:16 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.

9:17 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."

9:18 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

9:19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

9:20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;

9:21 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."

9:22 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.

9:23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

9:24 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."

9:25 He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

9:26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

9:27 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?"

9:28 Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.

9:29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

9:30 The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.

9:31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.

9:32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.

9:33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

9:34 They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

9:35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

9:36 He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."

9:37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he."

9:38 He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

9:39 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."

9:40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?"

9:41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

*This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ **Praise to Christ the Word***

‘Seeing what's there’

The backdrop to our gathering is COVID-19 so this is a different kind of sermon. It is likely that this will be the last time we gather in this church for corporate worship for some months. I will reflect on the gospel reading today and then outline initial thinking of our plan ahead from some church council

conversations. The reading today speaks to our context. It is a story of Jesus giving sight to a blind man. I am going through the story step by step.

The first part of the reading is conjecture about the origin of his blindness. Despite the community looking for people to blame – the man himself, his parents - Jesus blames no one. Jesus refuses to align sin with sickness; he refuses to blame anyone for people falling ill. As then, so now, including in relation to the latest virus. Blame misses the point.

The second part. Many translators differ from the New Revised Standard Version, the version we use at Knox Church, and I want to use that alternative reading. The NRSV says: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” But many scholars say the full stop is in a different place and the translation should read – “Jesus said “Neither this man nor his parents sinned. He was born blind.” Full stop. Then it continues, “So that God’s works might be revealed in him (in the blind man) we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.”

The Christian faith is primarily about being part of the life of God in the world, of doing the works of the God who sent us. A Christian is a person who acts as one sent into the world to do the work of God. A church is a body of people who together act as people sent into the world to do the work of God. Times such as this are for us to do the works of God while it is day.

Let’s put our physical gathering in that context. In the history of the church, physical gathering on Sunday has been one part of how we have formed and expressed Christian identity, but it is not the focus of our faith nor is it essential to being church. We are blessed with the gift of each other and the resources of the church to help us do the works of God, but there are many ways that gift comes to us beyond our Sunday physical gathering.

Years ago, when communism was still constraining Christianity in Eastern Europe, I was part of a group of New Zealanders who visited churches and met with church leaders there – in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and what was then called the Soviet Union. More recently, I was part of a group of Uniting Church in Australia leaders who met with church leaders in China. We learned that when people could not physically gather, the church spread and grew. In China, when Deng Xiao Peng came to power, religion surfaced again and Christianity burgeoned.

By having to find other ways of connecting beyond focusing on the physical gathering, they built a framework of life that enabled them to thrive. I am convinced that that is the opportunity before us now, especially with the gift of online communication. The Reformed movement grew in parallel with the development of the printing press – we now can discover the gift of online connection in our time.

So I invite us, please be careful with our language – the church is not closing and worship is not ending - far from it – rather, our physical gathering is ceasing and we are rediscovering dimensions of being church that may not have been so obvious to us.

Then ... Jesus said “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” In the midst of crises, we are invited to look for the light, to live in and from the light. Christ is our morning star, our light in the darkness. We are invited to understand what is happening against the backdrop of the love that is revealed in Jesus Christ, and to keep turning back to that light.

Then ... Jesus spits on the ground and makes mud with the saliva and spreads the mud on the man’s eyes, saying “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” What a mix mud is, saliva and dirt. The materiality that conveys the virus is also the materiality that helps heal us. The creation that binds us to each other as vulnerable beings is also the creation that provides the means of our healing. The use of mud echoes

the second creation story – “Then the Lord God formed man, *adaam*, from the dust of the ground.” The mud reminds us of our vulnerability and invites us to accept it as inherent to who we are. On Ash Wednesday we said – “Remember you are dust and to dust you will return.” We are people of this earth, and tied to its fortunes for health and illness. And we can imagine that the spreading of mud on the eyes represents what medical professionals do.

“Then he went and washed and came back able to see.” In the midst of COVID-19, we’re invited to see our deep connection to each other, our reliance on each other, our social solidarity and our collective vulnerability. The invitation is not to social distancing, but to physical distance and social solidarity.

Then ... John spends most time describing the many responses to the healing. Questions and rumours and half-truths swirl around, with a spirit of fear and anxiety. The Pharisees are afraid. The parents are afraid of what others say. But through it all, as best he can, the man once blind tries to say what he thinks happened to him, and he just keeps coming back to that experience. He speaks of what he knows, and so his witness persists despite all the questions, and all the anxiety. Jurgen Moltmann - “Hope is anticipated joy; anxiety is anticipated terror.” What do we know? With the psalmist – we are held in the steadfast love of God that endures forever. End of the reflection on the reading.

Let me speak more directly about our situation at Knox.

First, there has been a wonderful response of people offering help in many ways. Offers to buy groceries for people. Offers to phone people. Offers to help with our online work. Offers to help people develop their online skills. We will find a way to match offers with needs.

Secondly, we will further develop our pastoral network through the use of phoning. That is a priority. We will have a system for making regular contact. Some needs have already emerged, for example families divided by the travel ban.

Thirdly, we will develop our online presence. We have people with expertise offering to help. We will move from a focus on physical gathering to creative online engagement with people in and beyond our congregation. That involves much more attention to curating and publishing resources and inciting conversations. Already 162 households receive our weekly email. However, we will also pay attention to those who are not able to engage online.

Fourthly, our church council is meeting on Wednesday. We are going to focus on immediate needs but also on envisaging what kind of congregation we want to be in six months’ time. That will mean we will need to reallocate some resources towards that vision. We do know that that is going to change especially the work of Kerry, Karen our organist, Jacqui our secretary and Les our facilities officer.

Fifthly, we will be working with other churches, especially with First Church to share resources. This is not a time for fear or anxiety, but to hope in the gospel, and possibilities for congregation.

It is still daytime, to do the work of the one who sent us. Gracious God, In the midst of isolating, help us rediscover your strengthening presence, that nurtures souls, inspires love, nourishes hope, that elicits care. Amen.

We sing

1 As stars adorn the night-veiled sky,
arrayed like jewels rare and bright,
so shine God's saints in every age
to give the world new hop, new light.

2 The light saints bear is not their own
but shines through them as gift and sign:
to show how God can use and bless
frail human means for ends divine.

We pray for others

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the
glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

3 Through saints we glimpse the light of
Christ,
the Morning Star that crowns the night,
whose rising heralds God's new day,
the promised dawn of life and light.

4 The saints inspire and challenge us
our holy calling to embrace:
to bear Christ's light in our own day,
to be the vessels of God's grace.

(Wareham) CH4 748 - Carl P Daw, jr.

Anglican prayer book

**E tō mātou Matua i te rangi
Kia tapu tōu Ingoa.
Kia tae mai tōu rangatiratanga.
Kia meatia tāu e pai ai
ki runga ki te whenua,
kia rite anō ki tō te rangi.
Hōmai ki a mātou āiane
he taro mā mātou mō tēnei rā.
Murua ō mātou hara,
Me mātou hoki e muru nei
i ō te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.
Āua hoki mātou e kawea kia whakawaia;
Engari whakaorangia mātou i te kino:
Nōu hoki te rangatiratanga, te kaha,
me te korōria, Āke āke āke. Āmine.**

We share news and share the offering of Christ

"Ave Verum Corpus- Hail true body"

music William Byrd (1505-85)

*We recognise and bless the gifts brought to the table,
and those which wing their way electronically from our banks to the Church's account.*

We sing

1 Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.
*Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.*

(Christ be our Light) CH4 543 - Bernadette Farrell

2 Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.
[Refrain]

3 Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.
[Refrain]

4 Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.
[Refrain]

We are sent

Postlude

"Toccata Primi Toni"

Einar Trærup Sark (1921-2005)