

## **“What We Know”**

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**St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, KY**

**Fourth Sunday in Lent – 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020**

Brothers and sisters, my siblings in the family of God, it is the fourth week of Lent. Amidst cancellations, closures, suspensions, and postponements, the work of the church continues, the season of Lent continues, the fast continues. On Ash Wednesday, when Father Michael and I imposed a cross of ashes on many of your foreheads with our own hands, we could not have even imagined standing here now, unable to say when we will next be able to exchange embraces of peace with you. We could not have predicted even a week ago that we would be making the difficult decisions to isolate from family members and close friends, that we would be cancelling travel plans or that we would all be receiving crash courses in online worship and virtual community. There are a lot of questions and a lot of reasons to be anxious, a lot of unknown in our world right now. Over the years and with the help of many wise counselors, I have learned that, when faced with uncertainty, it is important to lean on what I know. I do not know what tomorrow will bring. What I do know, without a shadow of a doubt, is that today we begin the fourth week in Lent. I know that Jesus came to heal the sick and forgive the sinner and lift up those who carry the heaviest of burdens. I know that Jesus died and rose again so that we might live. These are the things I know. And in the words of our Savior which we heard just two weeks ago, “we speak of what we know, and testify to what we have seen.” This is what Christians do, even in crisis. We tell our stories of faith. Sometimes, it is the only thing left to do.

A long time ago, the son of God was walking along, having just been ejected from the temple by people who rejected his identity and were prepared to stone him. As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His followers saw this person and chose to use his life as a theological exercise, as an equation to which Jesus might give them the logical answer. Following the common assumptions of the time, they attributed the man's disability to sin, and asked whose sin was ultimately responsible. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" The disciples have fallen into the same trap that so many of Jesus' challengers fall into. They have looked at a person, and seen a problem. But Jesus, ever the patient teacher, corrects them. This man has not been born a particular way because of sin. That is simply the way he has been born. Jesus rejects the premise of the problem, and instead turns toward the child of God right in front of him. The incarnate Word of God, with his usual regard for decorum, spits on the ground, with his own two hands mixes it up with dirt to make mud, and reaches out and touches a stranger he has just met along the road. In this moment, Jesus is uninterested in theological exercises and moralizing questions. Jesus isn't even particularly interested in making sure this man knows who he is or where to find him! Jesus sees a man who has been forced to beg for sustenance and live in isolation, and offers him freedom from the darkness in which society has left him. Go and wash, Jesus says. And with that, the man is able to see.

The bulk of this story lies in the uproar in the blind man's community when he returns able to see after a lifetime of disability. The healed man's neighbors question him about the miracle of his sight, and interrogate him about the man called Jesus who performed it. The religious and community leaders continue the line of questioning. Rather than celebrating the overwhelming miracle of new sight in a man that has been blind since birth, the community

spirals in doubt and cynicism. The fact that this stranger performed the work of this miracle on the Sabbath is enough to cause some to say that Jesus does not come from God. Still others cannot fathom a sinner with the ability to work such wonders. Finally they remember the healed man, and turn to him for his testimony. Still they do not believe him, and call upon his terrified parents. Around and around they go, questioning everyone in hopes of finally hearing the answer they have all agreed is the correct one. But the healed man can only speak of what he knows. “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” Even this, the people do not accept, their hearts too hardened by their own false assumptions to hear true Gospel testimony. The religious and political leaders have chosen to reject Jesus because to them he is an unknown, an unpredictable element in their carefully controlled world. Their investigation is motivated by fear, not faith.

There is one character in the story whose voice we might miss in all the chaos. The healed man, who has endured first isolation and rejection due to his blindness, then interrogation and revulsion in response to his newfound sight. Not once has this man made an outlandish claim or posed a theological challenge of his own. From the very beginning, all he has done is tell the truth, tell his story, and interpret his experience through his faith in God. When he has answered all their questions and endured all their accusations, the healed man preaches to the doubters and the accusers and to us too. Using the truth of his own life, and what he knows to be true about God, the hero of the story speaks up, and shows us exactly what it means to live as children of Light. The healed man does not yet know who Jesus truly is, or how he was able to heal him. What he does know is that God is with those who worship him, and that incredible things can be accomplished only through the power of God’s love. Knowing these things, the man whom Jesus healed testifies in defense of a stranger. Faced with a world bent by fear and rejection of the

unknown, he chooses to speak to what he knows, and testify to what he believes. And for this incredible act of faith, his story is remembered and retold by generation after generation.

That's the theme of the story after all. Not just this snapshot from scripture, but the whole story of God's people. Faith. When we are talking about what we know about God, when we are testifying to what we have seen God accomplish with our lives, we are embodying and embracing our faith. We are telling the world who we are, because of who God is. We are being evangelists.

It is surreal to be talking about evangelism and testimony in a nearly empty building. But I am not preaching to a building, I am preaching to the church. This building is not the church, and this pulpit is not the only place where testimony is shared. Choosing to stay home to protect those who can't is a witness to the image of God you see in your neighbor. Choosing to make your home a place of constant prayer when you cannot kneel in these pews is a testimony of the faith you have in God's promises. Choosing to reach out safely to neighbors, family, friends, and fellow members of this parish is to be the church as Jesus named us, disciples defined by how we love one another. Amidst panic, fear, and uncertainty, to be Christian is to show the depth of your faith through the choices you make, the actions you take, and the stories you share. In times like these, faith is the most important thing we can do.