

## Sunday, June 7, 2020 – John 9:1-41

### First Reading – Micah 6:1-8

“Stand up, plead my case before the mountains;  
let the hills hear what you have to say.  
<sup>2</sup>“Hear, you mountains, the LORD’s accusation;  
listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.  
For the LORD has a case against his people;  
he is lodging a charge against Israel.  
<sup>3</sup>“My people, what have I done to you?  
How have I burdened you? Answer me.  
<sup>4</sup>I brought you up out of Egypt  
and redeemed you from the land of slavery.  
I sent Moses to lead you,  
also Aaron and Miriam.  
<sup>5</sup>My people, remember  
what Balak king of Moab plotted  
and what Balaam son of Beor answered.  
Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal,  
that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.”  
<sup>6</sup>With what shall I come before the LORD  
and bow down before the exalted God?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
<sup>7</sup>Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?  
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
<sup>8</sup>He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the LORD require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly<sup>[a]</sup> with your God.

### Scripture Reading – John 9:1-41

<sup>9</sup> As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”  
<sup>3</sup> “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup> As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”  
<sup>6</sup> After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. <sup>7</sup> “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.  
<sup>8</sup> His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” <sup>9</sup> Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”  
<sup>10</sup> “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.  
<sup>11</sup> He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

<sup>12</sup> “Where is this man?” they asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said.

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

<sup>13</sup> They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. <sup>14</sup> Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. <sup>15</sup> Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”

<sup>16</sup> Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”

But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So they were divided.

<sup>17</sup> Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.”

The man replied, “He is a prophet.”

<sup>18</sup> They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. <sup>19</sup> “Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?”

<sup>20</sup> “We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. <sup>21</sup> But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” <sup>22</sup> His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. <sup>23</sup> That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

<sup>24</sup> A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”

<sup>25</sup> He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

<sup>26</sup> Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

<sup>27</sup> He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”

<sup>28</sup> Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! <sup>29</sup> We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”

<sup>30</sup> The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. <sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. <sup>32</sup> Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. <sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

<sup>34</sup> To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

<sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

<sup>36</sup> “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

<sup>37</sup> Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

<sup>38</sup> Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, <sup>[a]</sup> “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

<sup>40</sup> Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”

<sup>41</sup> Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.”

This is the word of God for the people of God. And all God's people said, Amen.

Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons conducted an experiment, oh, many years ago at Harvard, that became infamous in psychology circles. Their book, *The Invisible Gorilla*, really popularized what was going on in this study. So, you might have been one of the millions of viewers who made their selective attention test one of YouTube's most watched videos.

The two researchers filmed students passing basketballs back and forth while moving in a circular fashion. And in the middle of the short film, a woman dressed in a gorilla suit, walks into the frame beats her chest and walks back out of the frame. The sequence takes nine seconds in a minute-long video and viewers are given specific instructions; count the number of passes by the players wearing white shirts. Of course, the researchers were not interested in the pass counting ability. What, what they were looking for was something obvious, like the gorilla. Amazingly, half of the test group did not even see the gorilla. How that's possible is beyond me. How do you miss a gorilla in the room? Today, the messages about opening eyes, and Jesus is doing so by pointing out a gorilla in the room; spiritual blindness.

As humans we go through life making assumptions, we assign meanings to happenings, often filling in the blanks with what we come up with. It's a human trait. Well these folks, at the beginning of Scripture that's what the disciples are doing. They're walking and they're listening to Jesus. And Jesus sees a man who is blind from birth, and the disciples ask what caused the blindness. Was it this man, or his parents? Well, the man who was born blind from birth. So obviously, if he was blind when he was born, he really had no chance to commit a sin, so obviously it couldn't be him. But did his parents really sin? And would that cause a child to be born blind? Is that how callous God really is? I don't think so.

Jesus immediately opens the eyes of the religious elite by clarifying that this has nothing to do with this man's sin, or the sin of his parents, nor is God punishing them or angry with them over something they've done. But like the religious elite, we still tried to fill in the blank sometimes and we try to assign some sort of meaning to what has happened in life. Sometimes we will joke and use humor to apply harmless meanings to make sense of things.

Well, in the past month or so, on top of dealing with the coronavirus, we've had two murders of black men hit the news, they've been followed by protests and sadness that has spread across the country. We've seen protests, we've seen riots, our hearts have echoed the sadness that the families feel. We've been confused, we've been distraught, we've been afraid. Many of you might have even heard that in Salt Lake City, the trumpet held by the angel Moroni at the Latter-Day Saints Temple fell off the statue. Some suggested it was a sign that the world was ending. And someone else said, maybe it's because the angel threw his trumpet down signaling that the end really isn't here, and that there's plenty more work to do. Maybe he was throwing down the trumpet of judgment.

Other times in life, like the religious elite often do, we assign meaning that can be dangerous. We assume, we gossip, we change the story up a little bit and sometimes we fill in blanks when we don't have all the facts. After all, if we open the eyes to the bad deeds around us, that may mean eyes are closed to anything that we might do.

One of the most dramatic encounters that Jesus had is found in the previous chapter in the Gospel of John, and that's when the Pharisees drag a woman who was caught in the act of adultery before Jesus, interrupting his teaching. And these holier than thou accuse her of committing adultery even claiming that she was caught in the very act. They asked Jesus whether the punishment for someone like her should be stoning, as prescribed in Mosaic Law.

I've always wondered about that story. How do you catch one person in the act? And if she was caught in the act, who were they covering up for? Because if they didn't haul the gentleman in with her, he must have been somebody that was fairly important. Oh, injustice. And that behavior believes what a lot of people believe today. We've heard it. It's an eye for an eye type of mentality. Many believe if we do something bad, it should be punished with something equally as bad. Blinded by the light maybe or what they thought was the light.

But Jesus sheds real light on the encounter with the Pharisees. Jesus first ignores the interruption and writes on the ground, as though he doesn't even hear them. But when the woman's accusers continue to challenge, Jesus himself opens eyes by announcing; the one who is without sin, that one should be the one to cast the first stone. And we all know what happens, the stones dropped from their hands, and the ousted accusers took their tails with their blinders removed with their sight restored with clarity restored that not one of them was without sin and they shuffle off.

In today's reading yet again Jesus solidly states, the concept of original sin is the construct of man, not of God. Jesus goes on to clarify that when a man is born blind, this happens so that God's mighty works might be seen. Not because he sinned, not because his parents sinned, not to get even, not because God's angry. He speaks to the poisons of assumption, false notions, false narratives, that are made up by the Pharisees. He confronts surface only viewers and says hold up, your sights a bit skewed. You are arrogantly blinded. You are assigning false meaning. This man is not blind, because of someone's sin, but only so that God might open eyes through him.

We look at the surface of everything that's going on today and we have to admit that we're taken aback, we're confused, we'd like to say that we don't agree with things, but then we're not sure what exactly it is we don't agree with. And there are many times where we question what's going on here and I understand the protests, but I'm not understanding that, who's involved in the riots and maybe the folks that are involved in the riots are doing so out of anger and yes maybe some of them are just coming in to infiltrate and take advantage of the situation.

We see people abused, at every turn; a jogger, a man in a car pulled over, a protester who winds up flat on his back on the ground, bleeding from his ear. And we make no sense of it, even just the normal humaneness that we live in, makes no sense of it. And then we look at this story and we see that the initial blindness is so God might work and God might move. The second blindness is a defect of the religious folk who are spiritually blind. The spiritual blindness is worse by far because physical blindness can be healed, spiritual blindness repels healing.

A friend sent a message the other day, and she was decrying the fact that our kids had missed so much school and was talking about what the coronavirus had done to education, and it seems that the world is finally realizing how serious the pandemic has become. The time of year that we've just celebrated Easter we have celebrated new life. And we know the promise is real, and yet, the world has been given I think a much needed timeout. Where we have been able to look at ourselves and to really see where we are with Christ. Some of us have taken time to shelter in God's presence instead of just shelter in place and it's made a difference in our lives. Today we see more clearly. Because of this pandemic that we were sure would destroy all of us.

Today, we see not just where we are with God, but where we are going, hopefully. Still others, O have wasted the time and spent it complaining about all the things that we cannot do, when God has given us the option to see all the things we could do. Bake a loaf of bread for a neighbor. Lift somebody's spirits with a wave and a hello. Take water to a protester. Fill somebody's gas tank. Call somebody and ask him

how we can pray for him. All of those things are things that we could do. Our life did not stop, it just changed. And perhaps along the way, our eyes opened. There is a nostalgic song that was written in 1985, and I wonder if some of us through kind of singing this song with our lives. We Are the World. We are the children We are the ones who make a brighter day. So, let's keep going.

We have an opportunity to participate in healing our world, a real chance to heal the world. Are we going to be able to stem the violence that has arisen? Probably not. Are we going to be able to walk into a city like Cleveland or some other along the way and stop the looting? Stop the rioting? Are we going to be able to impact the protests? Are we going to be able to stop the reaction of a police force that is mostly terrified of what they're seeing happening around the country, mostly concerned about people's welfare and then there are the situations that have gotten out of hand? Eyes have closed to the needs of the others, as we engage in this life. For many, many people the theology is me, me, me. But for us, for us, hopefully it will never again be about me, me, me.

How are you going to participate in the world Jesus' asks? Is your vision that of a follower, or a taker. Are your eyes opened or closed. Are they closed off to your neighbors in need. Are you adding to the negativity of the world, or are you serving as a follower choosing to open your eyes and be that helper, a door of good, pursuing acts of kindness, pursuing good deeds, shopping for the elderly, buying food for the neighbors, checking in on people.

It's easy to get stuck focusing on the negativity of the current climate, including all the physical devastations. It's easy to lose faith, to become spiritually blind, to become so aggravated with the situation that our last nerve is on edge. And we can't feel the presence of God but God is still speaking through this. So be a listener, be a follower, serve others because in serving others you will find that you are serving God. And in serving God, you will see the smile. The Divine smile that comes to his face. Don't allow yourself to get lost in the negativity with both eyes closed, blinded to the physical and to the spiritual.

For generations now, a lot of us have been spoiled to some varying degree. Many of us have a lot more than others. Some have very little, but I think it's fair to say that generally most of us have a lot more than what we could ever need. Even looking at third world countries today, things don't seem as third world as we watch people glued to their cell phone. There are many, many needs out there, and many, many needs that can be met. As individuals, giving as individuals, serving as groups coming together, and serving. It's what we do the best.

You know, a few months ago I was kind of sickened by a newscast where I watched somebody offer up a population of the elderly, to the coronavirus in the name of saving our income. I was pretty shocked. Eyes closed to the idea that we are one big family, and nobody gets left behind. I still can't really believe what I heard. And for many people in our world, that's what life is all about, they're sacrificed for one thing or another. Floor space has been exchanged for family and friendships, a life of overabundance stuff, stuff, stuff and more stuff, so that we sacrifice, time and energy. But all of that can be corrected. We need to become visionaries, and what kind of visionaries will we be? God sustained the Israelites in the desert for 40 years. That same God continues to sustain us and will continue to sustain us. He gave us science for a reason. He gave us doctors for a reason.

It kind of reminds me about a joke that I heard once; this fellow was stuck on a rooftop on a flood and if any of you have seen any really, really major floods, like those that happen after hurricanes, you know that this does happen. He was stuck on the rooftop, and he was praying to God for help. And soon a man in a rowboat came by and he said jump in, I'll take you to safety. And the man said no, no, no that's

all right, I'm praying to God, he'll save me. So, the rowboat went on and then a motorboat came by. And the fellow in the motorboat shouted, jump in, I'll save you. To this the stranded man said no thanks, I've prayed to God, God's gonna save me. So, the motorboat went on and then a helicopter came by and the pilot shouted, grab the rope, I'll lift you to safety. And to that end, the man on the rooftop shouted no, I'm praying to God, I have faith, he's going to save me. So, the helicopter reluctantly flew away, and soon the water came up above the rooftop and the poor man drowned. He went to heaven, and he finally got a chance to discuss the whole issue with God, at which point he exclaimed I had faith in you. Why didn't you come and rescue me? And God said, "Man, I sent a rowboat. I sent a motorboat, and I sent a helicopter, what more did you expect?"

In these difficult times, let's not be blind to the power of faith. But it's also important to remember that God has gifted His children with differing abilities. Let's pay attention to doctors. Let's pay attention to scientists. And let's pay attention to each other. Let's help each other discover those gifts that we can use to better our world, to reach out and to help those who have been treated unfairly. To find ways to stand up against injustice. To work for peace. Those doctors and scientists, and those people around you. Each and every one of us who have been so gifted from God, those are the row boats, the motor boats, the helicopters. And let's remember to love and worship the sender of those things. Let's take a good look. And realize that not only can the physical be healed but the spiritual can be healed as well.

People have been sleeping with one eye open. Sleeping with one eye open due to fear to the darkness that looms around them. When we only have one physical eye open, we see only darkness, that is around us. But when our spiritual eyes are open, we can see the light of Christ, as it continues to march into the circumstances. We wait for it to get brighter. The apostle Paul says we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the principalities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places. An entire system of spiritual darkness spearheaded by Satan himself and carried out by hordes of demons and influencing every corner of the earth rages right now below the surface of our everyday lives.

And this is when the army of the Lord has to take a stand. This is when we stand up and say, thus far, and no more. This is where we stand and we ask God to empower us with this spirit. And this is where we move forward in the power of the Spirit to take a stand against injustice in every form.

It may mean dealing with political battles. It may mean stopping on the street corner and delivering water to somebody who's been walking for hours with a pack on his back containing everything he owns. It may mean forming prayer teams and praying the darkness back out of our communities. Whatever it is we are called to proclaim the good news to the poor. Jesus says in Luke 14, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and the recovery of sight to the blind, to set it liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's failure."

We go out into the world every day, and as we go out, social distancing, looking for opportunities to spread love, I hope you focus those open eyes to the goodness in the world. Don't be negative. Don't let your 2020 vision, be over. We've been gifted with a multitude of opportunities to love better, and in many more ways than we used to. We have ways, given to us that we have not been able to love before, like the internet. We have gifts and opportunities to help each other, to get closer to our families by spending more time at home, and we can show up for each other by not showing up.

Don't close your eyes to become part of the negativity. The bashing, the bullheadedness. Don't operate with one open. For fear-based bias isn't becoming the followers of Jesus, either. Open both eyes. Open

your hearts and be the change you want to see. Then we can, through the power of the Spirit at work in us, begin to change our world in tangible ways. We can begin to learn peace and love mercy, and do justice. We can walk humbly alongside Jesus, and watch the miracles happen. Amen.