



Sunday's Sermon

Pastor Lara Forbes



Growing Together in Christ to Love and Serve All People

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 22, 2020

John 9:1-41

It sounds weird, but one of my favorite things to do is prep a garden space. The back yard where I lived in Phoenix was basically a dirt lot, except for the one corner I'd dug out for a vegetable garden. Every year, I spent a full day digging up the existing dirt. Adding fresh dirt and manure. And watering, watering, watering.

My favorite part was standing in the doorway of my house after I was done and looking across the yard at that space because it gave me a sense of peace like few other things did. It was a reminder to me that even though I wouldn't plant seeds or starts for a day or two, stuff was already at work in that dirt.

And then I'd go in and start the job of scrubbing my hands. Because even though I'd worn gloves, I always managed to get mud under my fingernails. And that's what I thought about when I read today's gospel reading and Jesus basically making mud.

But it wasn't just any mud - there was stuff at work in that dirt. The disciples wanted to know why the man was born blind - who had caused it? The man himself or his parents? Jesus said, neither one. It just happens sometimes. But watch how God works here.

In our current situation, we can joke and say that not only did Jesus *not* practice social distancing, he also touched *another* person's face with *really* dirty hands. But Jesus smeared that mud on the man's eyes and told him to go and wash. And he did. And his life changed forever.

You'd think that the whole community would have rejoiced and celebrated and welcomed him. But they didn't. In fact, they had kind of the opposite reaction. Once they admitted to themselves that who they were seeing really was the man who'd been born blind, they asked him repeatedly what had happened. How did he gain his sight?

And he answered truthfully. But they still didn't believe him, so they asked his parents. He's your kid, right? Yep. And he's of age. So if you want to know, go ask him yourselves. And back and forth it went until the man finally said, "Here's what I know: I was blind but now I see." And then they threw him out of the synagogue.

1 Sermon inspired by and based on: <https://alutheransayswhat.wordpress.com/2020/03/21/out-of-the-mud-sermon-on-john-9-lent-4a/>

Everybody's reactions here are all about fear - the fear of something new and different. And what their fear did was blind them. It kept them from seeing new possibilities and a new way of being for *anyone*. It kept them from seeing who Jesus really was. It kept them from seeing God at work in their midst.

In a manner of speaking, everything got muddy for them.

But the man who could now see? He saw Jesus, the one who gave him his sight. He saw God's love for the entire world. He leapt into a future as one of Jesus' disciples. He had a clear vision of God at work.

In a manner of speaking, everything that had been muddy for him was now clear.

It's easy to read the story of this event today and criticize the neighbors and the Pharisees and the man's family for the way they reacted. But we do the same thing more often than we realize. We get stuck in the way things have always been and can't always see our way through. We forget that God always calls us forward.

Whether we're aware of it or not, as we learn to live with a pandemic, we're relearning and rediscovering things that have been hidden from our view.

We're relearning how interconnected we all are to each other and to creation. Pollution levels are falling in areas where people are being told to stay in. Water is clearing, birds are being heard, and skies that are normally hidden by smog can now be seen.

We're being reminded that the people who are important aren't the celebrities or athletes, but rather the people who care for us and make sure we have what we need: doctors, nurses, first responders, teachers, grocery store workers, restaurant staff, truck drivers. And it's become clear just how vulnerable they all are.

As one of my colleagues puts it - our eyes are being opened to what we thought was clarity and vision, but maybe was never all that clear. That this muddy situation we're in is healing us from the vision of what we *thought* life was about, and our eyes are being opened to what God desires for us and is calling us into.

When Jesus gave the man his sight, he showed the religious leaders that what really matters is love, and compassion, and community. Not the rules and traditions that they'd put in place. Jesus showed them that they'd been blind to the needs and dignity of the people around them, but that healing was available for them, too.

And that the only way forward, the only way for people to live in the fullness of the life God desires for us, sometimes means letting go of the way things have always been done.

We've kind of been forced into that here. But as we restrict contact with each other and stay at home as much as possible for the next few weeks, what's becoming clear is the need to take care of people. As wonderful as it is for us to all be together, the best way we can care for each other right now is to stay apart.

And as we wash away the mud of the way we're used to doing things, we know that God is at work calling us forward. We're being reminded that the church was never about a building. It's about the people.

And church isn't even only *about* the people, it *is* the people. And don't get me wrong, having a sacred space to gather in community as God's people is important. And we will rejoice and celebrate when we're finally all able to be together again here. But at its core, the church is the people.

And even though we know that, in a manner of speaking, the mud is being washed from our eyes and revealing it to us in ways that we maybe haven't seen for a while. We're being shown new ways to be church for each other.

And as we move forward, we're coming to understand that we won't be able to just go back to the way things were because we've seen and heard and learned and experienced too much.

But when we *are* able to be together again in this space, we'll weave our experiences together and learn new ways to be community - both for ourselves and for the community-at-large.

As we move through this time, washing the mud away from our eyes as we go, the life God desires for us becomes clear. We see the seeds and starts that have been planted for a life of compassion, and love, and community expressed in tangible ways. A life that celebrates who people become when they live in the fullness of God's love and care.

A life that recognizes God calls us forward to be God's people in this world. Thanks be to God!
Amen.