**4th sunday of Lent- modified service March 22, 2020**

**zion lutheran church, philipsburg**

Welcome to this modified worship service. In these challenging times it is important for us to worship, even if we cannot be together. Know that each of you are in my prayers of safety, health, and courage in these times. For those of you with online access you will find the audio of this service posted both on Facebook and Zion’s website.

**INVOCATION:** We worship as we live, in the name of the Father, the Son +, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**CONFESSION:** God who is love, we come admitting the brokenness in our lives: the brokenness between ourselves, the brokenness between nations, the brokenness between humanity and creation. Give us the courage to acknowledge this pain. Give us the faith to trust your presence. Give us the desire to share your healing, promised and provided in Jesus Christ + our Lord. Amen.

**PRAYER OF THE DAY: (**Prayer used by permission of Augsburg Fortress)

Let us pray.

Bend your ear to hear our prayers and open our eyes to know and trust in you, Jesus Christ our Lord. By your gracious life and death for us, you brought light into the darkness of our hearts, and you anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

**1ST READING- Ephesians 5:8-14**

A reading from Ephesians.

8Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—9for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

**GOSPEL: John 9:1-41**

The holy gospel according to John.

1As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. 4We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 6When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, 7saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8The 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?” 9Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” 10But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” 11He 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.” 12They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”
  13They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15Then 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.” 16Some 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. 17So 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.”
  18The 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 19and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” 20His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21but 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.” 22His 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. 23Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”
  24So 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.” 25He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” 26They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” 27He 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?” 28Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” 30The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” 34They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.
  35Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” 36He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” 37Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” 38He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. 39Jesus 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.” 40Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” 41Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

**REFLECTION**

Grace and peace to you, children of God.

As I was preparing this homily throughout the week, the words of Amazing Grace kept popping into my head…”Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now I am found, was blind, but now I see.”

How many of us have felt lost this past week? There is so much anxiety, fear, and worry around us. We’ve heard phrases of the need for social distancing, shortages of personal protective equipment, and a necessity to flatten the curve. There is a 24-hour news cycle that gives us up to date numbers of those affected by Covid-19 and the numbers do not stop climbing. Restaurants, stores, factories, and businesses are closing or limiting their hours, and hospitals are in dire need of masks and hand sanitizer.

 Amazing grace, I once was lost…..

The blind man in our gospel reading today had been lost. There was a question of whether or not he was a sinner because of his blindness, he begged for money to survive in the world. He was an outsider who was defined by his disability, but then along came Jesus, this man who was the light of the world, and suddenly the blind man was healed. He could see! The man was found by Jesus and immediately he began to grow in faith and understanding. He did not know how he was healed; he did not know how it happened; he only knew that he could see. He was found and he was loved.

Amazing grace, but now I am found……

Let’s look at the reaction of the community when the blind man gained his sight, because suddenly the community did not recognize him, they were blinded. They would have known this man, they helped him all his life; they would have likely worshipped together, but now he was a stranger to them. Did they only see him for his blindness and not the spirit that lived inside the ma? And what about his parents? There did not seem to be much joy and celebration in knowing that their son could suddenly see. Their fear of the law and the Pharisees blinded their joy. Everyone except the blind man was blind to the capacity of believing and understanding what they had witnessed and experienced through Jesus Christ.

Amazing grace, I was blind……

Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus brought light into the world, he opened the blind man’s eyes so that he was able to see and live out the faith and hope of Jesus Christ. In these uncertain and challenging times, the light of Jesus still shines through the darkness, the light of Jesus Christ still shines in our world and in our lives. It shines in neighbours checking up on one another, it shines in leaving groceries on folks’ doorsteps so that no one goes hungry. It shines in conversations and signs of peace from afar. It shines in restaurants that give their weeks worth of food to homeless shelters, so that the least can be fed. It shines in hospital staff who work tirelessly to provide medical care to those who are ill and to those who will become ill. Our eyes have been opened to the light of Jesus Christ that is still shining despite the fear and anxiety that we are living at this moment.

Amazing grace, but now I see……

Everyone else may have abandoned the blind man after he gained his sight, but Jesus did not, and Jesus will not and does not abandon us. Jesus is the light of the world and in him we can trust that he will help us through the trials and tribulations of our lives. The grace of Jesus Christ is alive within the fear and anxiety we are feeling, telling us that we are not alone, that we are beloved children of a God who cares for each and every one of us. Through our faith we are steadfast in the knowledge that God has shoulders big enough to carry our fears and bring peace and comfort to our troubled hearts and minds.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.

May peace and courage be with each of you. Amen

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION(**used with the permission of Rev. Rick Pryce)

Turning our hearts to God who is gracious and merciful, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

God who gives sight to the blind, we confess that there are many things we do not see; the pain of our neighbours, your love for our enemies, your welcome of strangers. Open our eyes. In your unbounded mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God who brings healing to the sick, we offer our heartfelt thanks for those who bring your healing: doctors and nurses, first responders and volunteers. Show us how we can support them in your healing work. Open our eyes. In your unbounded mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God who restores us to community, in this time of isolation and fear, we ask for courage and faith. Show us new ways to care for the people around us, that even as we practice social distancing, we may not give in to social isolation. We especially remember those who work so that we may have food and safety. Open our eyes. In your unbounded mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God who calls your church to serve, we thank you for leaders who lead, for servants who serve, for the quiet who go about their ministry in the invisible corners of life. Strengthen us respond with love and compassion to these difficult times. Open our eyes. In your unbounded mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God who challenges our self-centredness, you call us to act on behalf of others. We remember all those who are isolated, who are fearful, and who are sick, especially Scott, Eddie and Zach, and those we name in the silence of our hearts. We celebrate the birth of Sadie, daughter of Sarah and Scott, and pray for Derreck, Tasha and Baby H. Open our eyes. In your unbounded mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God who sends your church to the world, we are afraid, yet we are called. Increase our faith. Open our eyes. In your unbounded mercy, **hear our prayer.**

According to your steadfast love, O God, hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to you; through Christ our Lord.

 **Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**(Prayer used by permission of Augsburg Fortress)

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name,

thy kingdom come,

thy 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 lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

and the power, and the glory,

forever and ever. Amen.

**BLESSING (**used by permission of Augsburg Fortress)

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord’s face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace.

**Amen.**

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\*Prayers of Intercession written by Rev. Rick Pryce