

1 Samuel 16:1-13  
Psalm 23  
Ephesians 5:8-14  
JOHN 9:1-41

### *Fourth Sunday in Lent*

*Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. Amen.*

Why? Why does something happen to one person and not others? Why does someone get cancer and die, when they are a really good person? Why do children die? Why do people cause their own deaths by their behavior, actions, or even harder, their own sadness? Why do really bad people seem not to have anything happen to them? Why?

Why does God allow these things to happen? Why aren't all our prayers answered.

The list goes on. We all ask those questions. We all want to know and there are no answers to our questions. The whys will always be there!

This scripture gives us some insight into the answer for the questions we ask: "so that God's works might be revealed." But, we don't want to hear that if it is a person we love and care about. We want what we want.

We want God to answer our prayers the way we want, but it isn't always that way. God does answer our prayers and miracles do happen. People do get well, stronger, and better. God is a good and loving God.

From the Old Testament, we have all the stories and examples of people being punished for their sins. Even whole communities and generations of families are punished. The Jewish laws and beliefs didn't just come out of thin air. They came out of their experience, their understanding of what occurred and became their tradition in Laws.

Because of the strict following of those laws, the Pharisees accused Jesus of being evil and a sinner not because he opened a blind man's eyes, but because he made the mud on the Sabbath. Where as Christians, we see this scripture as one of Jesus' miracles; as what God can do.

When we pray, we want that miracle too.

I recently read that when we pray God sometimes says yes, and sometimes says no, and sometimes there is no answer and we have to wait.

This church and many others have a powerful and faithful prayer life. There are no meetings except for Sunday service, no gatherings, no commitments; most of the information arrives online through e-mail. I have been part of a prayerful community of faith for many years and it is sometimes very hard and sometimes very challenging. But prayer works. Just like you, I pray with my whole heart and mind asking God: to heal

someone, to guide another, to provide strength as someone faces challenges, to bring comfort to those who have chronic illnesses, to keep someone safe from harm, to have a safe delivery and healthy baby, to open their hearts to others, to end conflict, and on and on and on. Sometimes we don't get the results we want and our hearts are broken. Yet, other times wellness is restored, health is improved, God speaks in the life of people struggling and changes are made for the better, people return safe from trips and war, babies are born well or grow in strength each day with prayer and loving care, plus modern medicine, people are opened to the feeling and words of others and they come to an understanding, conflict does end, and all is well.

But when things happen, you can't just sit there. There has to be action! This past week, God led me to stop at a friend's home and I found her sick in bed. She wanted someone to come back, so I asked another friend who lives around the corner from her to start checking. By the next afternoon, my friend, Sister Elizabeth Mary, knew she was very ill and needed to go to the hospital. Our friend, Robin, stopped by and started the process by calling 911. The prayers had already begun within a small group after my initial visit. By the time Sister left for the hospital many prayers had started. She had emergency surgery Wednesday morning and her family was called, things were not good and it was going to be hour-to-hour in medical hope. But, more prayers were starting. I was at work in Keansburg, down by the shore and Sister was at RWJUH in New Brunswick. I wanted to be there and God knew I had words of advice and encouragement to say, so my boss called and sent me to RWJUH to check on one of our patients, my company's not even my team's; so, I got to do both – see the patient I was sent to find and be with Sister, pray in her room, and speak to her family. God is good and, as our Bishop has encouraged us to say, “all the time.” I left for the Diocese convention, but that allowed Sister's group of friends to touch base with many more people and the whole convention prayed for her.

Prayer is a powerful tool for communicating all our feelings, desires, hopes, and concerns. Prayer mostly comes out of our hope, but can come out of our anger. Always remember prayer is OUR communication with God. It is our talking with and to him. Prayer can be any time, any place, and any form.

I have had many experiences of carrying someone in prayer day and night, talking to God a lot and not getting the answer I want. I have had many experiences of carrying someone or thing in prayer day and night, talking to God a lot and getting the answer needed, because it may not be about what I want.

But I have never, never stopped praying. I guess through time, I have learned to accept that there is a bigger reason that I don't know or need to know. At times, my prayer just changes. For I believe, with all my heart and mind, that Jesus brought the light of God into the human experience and that light leads me from day to day. It may be called faith, but it has been learned from experience and trust in God and Jesus as my savior.

Each of our journeys through life is different, because each of us is different. But we all have one thing in common; God made each of us who we are and loves each of us.

Most of you know I love flowers and plants. Most of the time, I have something to do with the decorations for our worship. Several years ago, I was in a church and saw

the simple Lenten display of “curly willows”. The way they looked stuck with me, so I brought the idea to our Worship Committee.

You see, they aren’t just “curly willows” – they are a metaphor of our lives: together and individually. They are here for our reflection during the Lenten season.

Remembering that most plants grow toward the light and taking that reality, as Christians believing that Christ is the Light of our lives; each branch is its own metaphor for a person’s life. Let me show you what I mean; I choose three as examples.

The first one is fairly straight. As a symbol of a person’s life journey, it is a fairly straight path, varied some, but continued to its end.

The second one has a very different life journey. Early it splits from the stronger main branch, but comes back. It bends and branches off. It doesn’t have a single straight end. It is probably more like most of us than the first branch. Lives that split, curve, and bend, but have a strong, thick, and straight foundation.

The third one has shoots that go off from the thick, strong center. They curl with it as it goes toward the light. This branch takes many bends and turns, even to the end.

If these branches are symbols of our lives; they are about our journey.

Today, we honor the healing ministry of the Christian church. We will read the Litany of Healing and each of us will have the opportunity to come forward for individual prayer. We honor this today, but each Sunday the opportunity for individual prayer, anointing, and “laying on of hands” is available to each of us. I also come to the altar for healing prayer, for anointing, and “laying on of hands”; frequently I stand before Fr. Breedlove and say – “I need special prayers today” for I am fighting a whole range of medical issues and pain. Many Sundays, I leave when Fr. Hubbard starts his sermon not because I heard it at the 8:30 service and don’t need to hear it again, but because I forgot to take medication and the pain is starting. I need to hear all the “word” as much and as often as I can. I also have full time medical support from a wonderful doctor who helps me control and manage all my issues, from all the nurses and staff I work with, and from all my prayer friends. Please place my name on the chronic prayer list and keep me in your prayers.

The healing and prayer ministry is what God called me to. I live this ministry seven days a week. In my work, I pray with people, I touch them, and I ask God’s healing grace. This is one of those situations, where it is “healer, heal thyself.” So, pray for me. We read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm today; I frequently say it with or for my patients; but, it has been a favorite of mine since my 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher made us memorize it. At work, I can say the “Lord’s Prayer” a dozen times in a day. God knew how much I needed to pray, so God called me to the ministry of prayer. As a chaplain and deacon, my praying is obvious but God knew time for prayer was an “issue” for me so he made it my work. But, I didn’t get this ministry from those facts or my needs.

I started the same way you did. I was baptized and marked as Jesus’ own and as the reading from Ephesians told us, we can “live as a child of the Light.” We can each touch others by sharing our story and we can literally touch others with a smile, a soft touch on a shoulder or a hand, a supporting comment, offering to pray for them, and by our kindness and love. When the “Light of Jesus” fills our hearts and minds, we do these

things by our behaviors each day. All of us can no matter our age. How often are we touched by the simple love or honesty of a child? My whole life and spirit changes by just looking at my grandson's picture and holding him brings me the warmth and love of God's continuity of family and seeing my son kiss him; such joy I have never known. God is good. [Congregation responds: All the time.]

Back to church and my purpose here, this was the second week in our Gospel lesson Jesus told someone he was the "Son of Man." He didn't tell his disciples, he told someone like you and me. That's how God works. Jesus came for all of us not just for a small few.

We are each called to find God's purpose in our lives and follow it. What do you want your life's journey to look like? What do you do when God doesn't answer your prayers the way you want? What kind of "curly willow" are you?

Let this Lenten season help you to sort out some of your questions, accept the answers, and keep asking. Our relationship with God is a lifetime journey. Remember all journeys start with the first step. Let us pray: [the following is sung] May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God our Father and the fellowship, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all for evermore and evermore. Amen. Sister Elizabeth Mary taught me to sing that.

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