

**THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT**  
**SUNDAY, MARCH 22, 2020**  
**10:30 A.M.**

*Crescent Fort Rouge is a safe place for all people to worship regardless of race, creed, age, ability, cultural background, sexual orientation or gender expression  
Our mission is to invite all who would join us, to celebrate the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, through worship, music, fellowship and outreach, to help us build a fairer and more joyful world*

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF TERRITORY**

*We gather for work and worship on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, and Dakota nations, and the homeland of the Metis people. Long before adventurers, colonizers, settlers, refugees, or immigrants from other places came to the place we call Manitoba, the people of Canada's first nations held this land as a sacred trust from the Creator. They offered assistance to the first travelers to this place and shared their knowledge for survival in what was at times a harsh climate. May our relationships as settlers and Original Peoples be based in honour and deep respect.*

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE**

God said, "Let there be light."  
And there was light.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world."  
And the light shone in the darkness.

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world."  
And the light shall not be quenched.

*(Light Christ Candle)*

Together, let us walk in the Light of Christ!

## ***LIGHTING THE DIVERSITY CANDLE***

Deep calls unto deep, life calls unto life, light calls unto light.

**We are a rainbow people, and in all our diversity,  
Christ's light shines through us, making us one.**

## ***AN INVITATION INTO STILLNESS***

This is a sacred time. This is a sacred space--  
a space for questions more profound than answers;  
vulnerability more powerful than strength;  
and a peace that can pass all understanding.

In the quiet of this moment, in the stillness of this space,  
let us draw near to God.

## ***PRAYER***

Gracious God, you created us in your own image.

We are grateful for all that you have done for us,  
for all that you are doing in us,  
and for all that you will do through us.

Open our eyes to see your presence among us,  
moving in powerful ways at all times and in all places.

Open our ears to hear familiar words in new ways—  
ways that will change us and challenge us  
to become the people you created us to be.

Grant us the power and the courage  
to come out of the darkness  
and into the light of Jesus Christ,  
that we may serve you by serving others.

We love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.  
Amen.

## **WE HEAR AND REFLECT ON THE GOOD NEWS**

### **AN INTRODUCTION TO READING** *(author unknown)*

*John 9:1-41 is the third of four long passages from John during Lent. In this passage, the disciples ask Jesus about a man who was born blind, whether he sinned or if his parents did. There was an old belief that God punished people for the sins of their parents or grandparents, but this was starting to be questioned by prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, over five hundred years before Jesus. So Jesus is not giving a new answer to an old question, but rather suggesting that the question is pointless to begin with. However, this passage is still very troubling. It suggests that people with disabilities are to be used as examples of how God works through healing miracles.*

*In our world today, we often single out persons with disabilities as examples of triumph over disability to be examples or inspiration for others. As a mother of a child with a disability, I reject that notion. I also admit that the healing passages of Jesus can be troubling, but they reflect a worldview of the first century that disability meant someone was not whole and not able to participate in society—that they were somehow less than others and that Jesus made them whole.*

*But the other part of this passage is that the man was a beggar (vs. 8)—if you were disabled in the first century, you could not work and had to beg in order to survive. This man no longer has to beg. In today's world, we have learned that persons with disabilities can fully participate in society and work and play with everyone else. Nancy Eisland, who wrote *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* would say that we are all “temporarily abled.”*

*While this long passage is included in the lectionary during Lent as a way of revealing who Jesus is, that Jesus is the one who opens the eyes of the people metaphorically to see God in a new way—we must be aware of how this passage has been read in the past and how it can be used to limit our view of persons with disabilities.*

*We are called to be children of light. There should be no darkness, no shame, no guilt—everything we do ought to reveal who God is to the world. Do we live up to this? Probably not, but it is what we strive for. And part of the work of being children of light is being careful of who we might leave in the dark, or that we ourselves may not be embracing the children of God as fully as we ought to.*

*There is so much that we do not perceive ourselves, but God views what we cannot; God knows what we do not. We are all cherished and loved by God. We are all walking towards the light, even if there is darkness around us. Sometimes, in the darkest times of doubt in my life, the prayer that I have uttered is: “I know, that I know, that I know.” In other words, I know, deep down, there is more to life than what I have experienced and perceived, and I know, that I know, that I know—God is with me, and I am not alone.*

**SCRIPTURE READING—John 9:1-41** (paraphrased by Nathan Nettleton)

One day, Jesus and his disciples were heading down the street when they saw a man who had been blind since birth. The disciples asked, “Rabbi, was this man born blind because of his own sins or because of the sins of his parents?”

Jesus replied, “You can’t blame either him or his parents for his blindness. The important thing to look for is not what caused it, but what God can do about it.

The one who sent me has given us work to do, and we had better be on the job as long as it is still day. Night fall will put an end to everyone’s work soon enough, but as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Having said this, he spat on the ground and made a mud ointment from a mixture of dust and saliva. He pasted the mud over the blind man’s eyes and sent him off to wash himself in the Siloam Pool. (The name Siloam actually means ‘sent’.)

The man went and washed, and when he came back he could see.

It certainly caused a stir. People who knew him or were used to seeing him begging for money on the streets were soon asking, “What’s going on here? Isn’t this the blind bloke who is always rattling his can on the street?”

Some were saying, “It’s him alright,” but others reckoned it must just be someone who looked like him.

He kept insisting that he was indeed the same man, but some took a lot of convincing and kept demanding an explanation for how he could now see.

All he could do was repeat the story:

“Someone called Jesus spread mud on my eyes and told me to go and wash in the Siloam Pool. So I went and washed it off, and now I can see.”

Then they wanted to know where Jesus was now, but the man said, “I don’t know.”

The people then marched him off to the relevant authorities — the leaders of the devoutly religious Pharisee party.

The day on which Jesus had made the mud and healed the man’s blindness was a Sabbath day, so there were questions of religious law at stake.

The authorities questioned the man about how he had received his sight. He told it to them straight:

“The man spread mud on my eyes. I washed it off, and now I can see.”

Some of the Pharisees were quick to express their opinion:

“Obviously this man is not from God, because he doesn’t even stop what he is doing on the Sabbath.”

But others were not so sure: “How could a man who was against God have the ability to do things which so clearly point to God’s involvement?”

Since they were divided over the matter, they asked the man what he thought. “It was your eyes he opened. What do you make of him?”

The man replied, “I think he is God’s messenger!”

Some of the religious leaders began casting doubts on whether the man who had been given his sight had really been blind in the first place, so his parents were called in for questioning.

“Is this man your son?” they were asked. “Are you sure he was blind? How then, is it that he can now see?”

His parents answered, “This is certainly our son, and we know, without the slightest doubt, that he was born blind. But as to how come he can see now, or who was responsible for opening his eyes, we are completely in the dark. Why don’t you ask him? He’s a grown man and can speak for himself.”

His parents were playing it safe because they didn’t want to get on the wrong side of the authorities. The authorities had already made up their minds that any one who expressed the belief that Jesus was the Messiah would be stripped of their membership of the Synagogue.

With that threat hanging over their heads, his parents handed the question back to their son.

So the authorities called in the man who had been blind and questioned him for a second time.

They said to him, “Swear by God to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. We know that the man who did this to you is opposed to God!”

He replied, “I wouldn’t know anything about that, one way or the other. The one thing I know for sure is this: I was born blind, but now I can see.”

“So what did he do to you?” they demanded to know. “How did he open your eyes?”

He answered, “I have already told you all I can about that, but you didn’t want to believe me. Why do you need to hear it over and over again? Are you planning to sign up as his followers?”

At that, they went off their heads at him, saying, “You are obviously following him, but we are followers of Moses. We can know for sure that God spoke to Moses, but this Jesus is a no-one. We don’t even know where he comes from.”

“Well what a bizarre situation this is,” said the man. “You lot don’t know the first thing about him, and yet he gave sight to my blind eyes. Everybody knows that God doesn’t team up with liars and crooks. It is only the person who worships and obeys God that God is going to take sides with. Never before in the whole history of the world has anybody heard of someone opening the eyes of a person who had been blind from birth.

So surely if this man were not from God he wouldn't be able to do such a thing."

With that, they wrote him off. "You are nothing but the scum of the earth, and you always have been. How dare you talk to us like that!" And they threw him out into the street.

Word reached Jesus that they had thrown the man out, so he went and found him. "Do you believe in the New Human?" Jesus asked him.

The man answered, "I don't know who he is, mister, but if you will introduce me to him, I will believe in him."

Jesus replied, "You have seen him, sure enough. You are talking to him right now!"

The man said, "Lord, I believe in you!" and fell to his knees at Jesus's feet.

Jesus said, "I came into the world to sort out who was who. I came so that those who have been kept in the dark might see, and so that the blindness of those who see might be exposed."

Some members of the Pharisee party overheard this, and stopped to question him. "You are not suggesting that we are blind, are you?"

But Jesus replied, "If you were blind, you would not be held guilty. But since you claim that the way you see things is the only way they can be seen, you've got blood all over your hands."

## **RESPONSE**

Let us hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church. **Amen.**

## **WE REFLECT**

### **WE RESPOND IN FAITH**

## **AN INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP** *(adapted from Ephesians 5:5-14)*

We used to be like people living in the dark,  
but now we are people of the light  
because we belong to Christ.

So let us act like people of the light  
and make our light shine.

The bright light of Christ makes our way plain.

So no more stumbling around. Let us get on with it!

The good, the right, the true—  
these are the actions appropriate for daylight hours.

Let us figure out what will please Christ,  
and then do it.

Let's not waste our time on useless work, mere busywork,  
the barren pursuits of darkness...

Let us wake up from our sleep,  
Climb out of our coffins;

Christ will show us the light!

Let us watch our steps. Use our heads.  
Make the most of every chance we get.

These are desperate times!

But love is stronger than hate;  
Hope is stronger than fear;  
Good is stronger than evil.

The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has never put it out.

***AN AFFIRMATION OF FAITH*** (a creed from Indonesia, adapted)

**We believe in God, who is love  
and who has given the earth to all people.**

**We believe in Jesus Christ, who came to heal us  
and to free us from all forms of oppression.**

**We believe in the Spirit of God,  
who works in and through all  
who are turned to towards the truth.**

**We believe in the community of faith,  
which is called to be at the service of all people.**

**We believe in God's promise  
to finally destroy the power of sin and death in us all  
and to establish the kin-dom  
of justice and peace for all humanity.**

**We do not believe in the right of the strongest,  
nor the force of arms, nor the power of oppression.**

**We believe in human rights, in the solidarity of all people,  
in the power of non-violence.**

**We do not believe in racism,  
in the power that comes from wealth and privilege,  
or in any established order that enslaves.**

**We believe that all are equally human,  
that order based on violence and injustice  
is not order.**

**We do not believe that war and hunger are inevitable  
and peace unattainable.**

**We believe in beauty of simplicity,  
in love with open hands, in peace on earth.**

**We do not believe that suffering needs to be in vain,  
that death is the end,  
that the disfigurement of the world  
is what God intended.**

**But we dare to believe always and in spite of everything,  
in God's power to transform and transfigure,  
fulfilling the promise of a new heaven and a new earth  
where justice and peace will flourish. Amen.**

***AN INVITATION TO SELF OFFERING*** (Jeff Shrowder, adapted)

May God, the Source of life, receive the gifts we offer;  
and may all our service, inspired by the Breath of life  
give God glory and praise;  
in the name of the Word of life. Amen

## ***PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND CONCERN***

Generous God and Giver of all things,  
we rest in your loving and tender care;  
and we are revived, restored and renewed  
by your strength and encouragement.

You go before us in life,  
leading us in pathways that are secure  
without the confusion of becoming lost,  
aware only that we always need to follow you;  
and so we trust in your guidance and wisdom.

As human beings, we know there will be times of stress,  
when our body or mind lets us down;

We know there will dark times too,  
when life seems to be nothing but struggle;  
and it is in those times especially,  
that we rely on your Presence deep within us  
to guide and bless us.

Grace-Giving God,  
You provide us with the tools we need  
for the tasks we face,  
and for this we give you our trust and our thanks.

Life-Giving God,  
you put out the 'Welcome' mat for us  
as we gather to worship you.

You nourish our souls and bodies  
through your goodness and tender mercies;  
you heal our life's wounds;

And your generous love fills us to overflowing.

You give us an honoured place at your table,  
and invite us to stay with you as your guest forever.

You have promised that your unfailing love  
will stay with us always,  
and for this, we give you our thanks.

In peace, we pray to you, God.

For all people in their daily life and work;  
for our families, friends and neighbours,  
and for those who are alone...

For this community, our country, and the world;  
for all who work for justice and peace,  
health and wholeness...

For the just and proper use of your creation...

For the victims of hunger, fear, injustice and oppression...

For all who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble...

For those who minister to the sick, the friendless  
and the needy...

For the peace and unity of the Church of God...

For all who proclaim the gospel, and for all seek the truth...

For the United Church of Canada...

For Richard Bott, our Moderator  
And all General and Regional council staff...

For the members of our leadership team,  
and for all who hold positions of leadership  
in this congregation;

For all who serve God in the church and in the community...

For our own needs,  
and for others for whom you have called us to pray...

Listener to our hearts:  
you are the One who sends us on journeys  
and waits for us at the final destination.

Healer of our lives: when we find ourselves  
in valleys veiled in shadows,  
you are walking alongside us  
even though we may never notice.

Comforter of our souls:  
when we are weakened by the burdens of our lives,  
you come to us,  
to rest your strengthening peace upon us.

God in Community, Holy in One:  
once we could not see you in every moment,  
but now our eyes are opened wide,  
and so we pray together, saying,

## ***THE LORD'S PRAYER***

**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,  
the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.**

## ***WE GO INTO THE WORLD***

### ***BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH***

The God we worship is never confined to one holy place.  
So let us be with the God  
who is found in ordinary and surprising places.

In caring for one another, may we be untiring.

In sheltering one another, may we be strong.

In holding one another, may we be tender

For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"  
who has shone in our hearts  
to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God  
in the face of Jesus Christ.

Go now in peace. Amen.