

## Live in the Light of God

Friends in Christ,

This has been a week we won't easily forget. And it seems that we have more days ahead that will be unique, unforgettable, even life-changing, as our society attempts to slow down the new coronavirus. One of my children asked me if I remembered a time like this, and I thought of the days after the 9-11 attacks, though life returned to some type of normality within a few days. You might remember another time when everything seemed to change.

In our Gospel (John 9), we have a man who had an unforgettable day. He was blind. In fact, he had been blind from birth. And suddenly, Jesus allowed him to see. Talk about life-changing! He could see his family, see the plants and water and the sky—everything was different!

But let me suggest that there was a more life-changing event in this man's life. And there was a more life-changing event in your life than this Covid-19 scare no matter how it turns out, or any other great disaster you can recall. Paul refers to it in our Second Lesson: **“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”** Yes, when God brought you to faith in Jesus, it changed your life more than shutting down schools and businesses and whatever else may close. It changed your life even more than if you had been given the gift of sight. When you were brought to faith in Jesus, you received relief from all your guilt; you got an answer to all your fears; you had a reason to rejoice no matter how bad things may seem; you even had reason to be confident in the face of death.

Today, with all the fears and uncertainties we face, let us Live in the Light of God.

Our Gospel begins with Jesus traveling and coming across a blind man. His disciples ask, in a sense, Why was he blind? How could this happen?

Many people are asking, How could this virus happen? Pandemics or plagues—it sounds like something from the Middle Ages. With all the medicine and technology we have, how could this be?

The first answer, which the disciples refer to, is sin. When our first parents, Adam and Eve, were created, they did not have to worry about any viruses. Did they wash their hands? I suppose, but not for the reason we wash for 20 or 25 seconds. Have you heard about composers writing little songs that last as long as you're supposed to wash? Or someone suggested speaking the Lord's Prayer—it takes about 20 seconds—though you really should concentrate on the Prayer and not scrubbing your hands when you pray.

In any case, Adam and Eve didn't need to time themselves. They didn't need to maintain social distancing. There weren't any viruses to catch or to spread.

At least, not until they ate that fruit. Once they disobeyed God, all the problems of this world came crashing down. You want to talk about a life-changing, world-changing event? The Fall into Sin brought pain and disease and finally death.

One reason God allows disease and sorrow and handicaps is to remind us of sin, the sins we each continue to carry out. We rebel against God like Adam and Eve, and we do it every day. We need to repent of our sins, and cry out to God for mercy.

But in our Gospel, Jesus' disciples weren't thinking about their own sins; instead, they were focused on what other people did. **“His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’”** The disciples assumed someone must have done something pretty bad that this man was blind.

The modern term for this is karma. The idea that there is some kind of justice behind everything in the universe. Live well and you'll do well. Live badly....

You may have seen a video a few years ago about a guy in a pickup truck who tailgates a woman, then pulls around to pass her, sticking out his hand with a certain finger extended, laughing to himself—and just after that, his truck spins out and he crashes into a ditch. That is karma. People love it. He got what was coming to him.

**“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”** We can so easily think that way, because it allows us to make sense of the world. Someone gets cancer? Well, he smoked for 20 years. Heart attack? Not enough exercise and a poor diet. Car accident? Must have been careless – And the point to it all? I would never do that.

We could even think this about the coronavirus. First it was the Chinese who got what was coming to them—and then the Italians and the West Coast.... And even as it spreads in our state, there's a part of us that wants to think, “They must have done something to deserve that; I sure don't.”

But we know that's not right. We all deserve disease, we deserve pain, we deserve death. And the fact that a virus like this can strike so many people, good as well as bad, even us, makes it clear. Karma is not the answer.

The band U2 has been around for a long time. You may have heard that the lead singer, Bono, is a professed Christian. Once he was asked what drives him, he said this: **“It's a mind-blowing concept that the God who created the universe might be looking for company, a real relationship with people; but the thing that keeps me on my knees is the difference between grace and karma.”**

You see, what did the almighty God do about our sin? He did not set up a system of rewards, where the good always prosper and the evil always suffer. For none of us is good enough to deserve his prosperity. Karma doesn't work.

We see how God answers the problem of sin in our Gospel. Jesus said, it wasn't a particular sin by the man or his parents or anyone else. **“This happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him...While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ After saying this,”** Jesus gave the man sight.

Notice—the man was helpless. He couldn't give himself sight. And he didn't do anything to earn God's help. No, Jesus did this purely out of love for the man. This is grace—love that we don't deserve. And this is how God deals with us, not with karma.

You don't get what you deserve; Jesus got it. Jesus took away all the punishment for your sin by taking it on himself. He saw how helpless you were to be saved, so he took his perfect self, his perfect life, and gave them up for your sake.

When we hear of Covid-19, or any other cause of death, it's natural to be afraid. But then we see Jesus going to his cross and dying for us, and we have the answer. If we should get sick, even when we die, that is not God punishing us. No, he punished his own Son in our place. All of our sins are paid for. As Paul wrote, **“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”**

So at a time like this, we run to Christ. We pray that he deliver us from this virus. We pray that he deliver those afflicted with it. We pray that he strengthen those in the medical fields and in government who are working for our safety.

And how does Jesus strengthen us? Through his Word, of course; but he uses Christians, us, to bring his Word to others individually.

Did you notice how Jesus healed the blind man? **“He spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes.”** Then he told him to wash in a pool, and the man could see.

Talk about breaking the rules! Not just the rules we follow today, but any time in your life, you wouldn't use spit to make mud and put it on someone's eyes! Of course, Jesus is not telling us to do such a thing; this just describes what he did.

But why would he do that? Probably because this was something the man could feel. He could understand that Jesus was helping his eyes. In other words, Jesus was personalizing his love.

It reminds me of how Jesus showed his love for you. Not only did he pay for your sins. Not only did he tell you about that in his Word. Jesus personalized that message, when you were baptized. Your sins, your personal sins, were washed away at your baptism. Jesus was making it clear how much he loves you personally. And he reiterates that when he invites you to receive his body and blood in Holy Communion.

**“Now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light,”** Paul said.

At this time of crisis in our society, now is the time for us to shine with the light of Christ. Now we can show the love Jesus showed us.

That starts with, yes, washing your hands, and keeping your distance from others. We don't know who has this virus—some may have it now; we don't want to spread that to anyone.

We shine the light of Christ when we help others. During the next weeks, there will be people who need help, in getting groceries or who knows what. Our Stewardship Board has a sign-up in back where you can volunteer to help those we learn are in need.

We shine with the light of God when we are patient in a stressful time. Understand that most everyone has reason to be anxious now. And we Christians can encourage one another.

We shine with the light of God when we share the Good News of what Jesus has done. There is a whole world out there that is hurting and afraid. Tell them about the one who came to save. Tell them that God holds us in his perfect hands. Tell them that even the hairs on their heads are numbered. Point them to the fact that Jesus not only died, he rose from the dead, and all who trust in him are assured that we too will rise.

This coronavirus is a cross for us to bear. But Scripture says that crosses always drive people to Jesus. You are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. Seize this opportunity to shine with the light of God. Amen.