

**Sermon + Lent 4, John 9:1ff.**  
**March 22, 2020**  
**For Resurrection Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
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Greetings in Jesus' name! Here we are in uncharted waters as we endeavor creatively to be and to do church in this time of upheaval with the global pandemic. Preaching alone to a camera is a first for me. So, may God in Christ bind us together in these new formats so that we may continue to proclaim the gospel. Let this new venture begin as we are led by the Holy Spirit ever more deeply together into God's word.

The holy gospel according to John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

“As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ which means Sent. Then he went and washed and came back able to see.”

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Wash your hands. Wash your hands. Wash your hands. Keep your distance – at least six feet. And don't touch your face.

We've heard these admonitions again and again in recent days, and will hear them again and again in coming weeks and months.

With the growing specter of what is now a pandemic, I have been ever more vigilant about personal hygiene, washing my hands much more than usual. But I must confess that I've struggled with not touching my face. I'm becoming more disciplined at not reacting to every little itch, but it's been a challenge.

Given our vigilance about personal hygiene currently, the image in today's gospel reading is jarring, and provoked a visceral reaction in me: Jesus “spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes.”

My reaction to this image of Jesus spreading spit-laden mud on the blind man's eyes? That just gross. Until the last several days, I had not thought much about the eyes as an entry point for pathogens. Viruses and bacteria thrive in saliva. Then also what was in the dirt on the ground? How much animal excrement?

Moreover, for the man to then be told to wash in the pool of Siloam, that could not have been very hygienic either.

Yet Jesus' method of making mud with saliva, spreading it on the eyes, and washing in a pool without the benefit of chlorine where everybody else is washing, this method made for healing.

How can this be? It's confounding at first glance, repulsive even. And yet it's a paradox of our Christian faith which is replete with paradoxes everywhere you turn. Jesus brings sight and healing to the man born blind through what we deem as a filthy, dangerous modality. This paradox confounds our sensibilities.

As a pastor, I'm clearly no expert on vaccines, and thanks be to God that scientists around the world are rapidly seeking to produce a vaccine for this coronavirus that results in Covid-19 as a disease.

But as I understand the process, the production of vaccines begins with the virus, the pathogen itself. That seems counterintuitive at first, and even dangerous, but it's the way to build immunity.

And perhaps there are parallels with Jesus' method in the gospel. There is sacred, healing energy and agency in the mud and the dirty water of the pool.

Which is to say, when the word of God was made flesh in Jesus Christ, God entered even into the filth and messiness and repulsiveness of humanity's most unseemly realities.

When it comes to sin, Jesus enters into the fullness of human sinfulness, as an antidote to that sin, as a means of eradicating its effects and claims on us, just as vaccines start with the pathogen itself for building healing immunities.

Or as the apostle Paul says it in 2 Corinthians (5:21) concerning human sinfulness, “<sup>21</sup>For our sake [God] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

In brief, Jesus, the word of God made flesh, is our antidote to what ails us spiritually and existentially.

By extension in our current realities as a species, we trust that God in Christ is still present and active in healing, redemptive ways through the power of the Holy Spirit. We confess that the Spirit's healing winds blow in, with, under, and in spite of the coronavirus and the various responses to this pandemic.

Even as it is too early yet in this pandemic for there to be a viable vaccine for the coronavirus, it may be too early to discern the sacred hand in the midst of this global crisis.

But it strikes me that the call to radical social distancing, even with its devastating effects on the economy, on livelihoods, and the well-being of people and communities and churches throughout the world, it may be that such social distancing is a paradoxical way to preserve human life and human community, even if it seems at first glance to further divide and diminish communities in an already divided age.

Certainly, one of the lessons I see in the global pandemic is the reality revealed in bold relief of the radical interdependence of human beings on each other, not just locally or nationally, but internationally. What affects one affects us all. What started in a region in China is in virtually every nook and cranny in our astonishingly interconnected globe.

Perhaps this pandemic is a holy wake up call to nurture greater international cooperation and collaboration at a time in human history when we have otherwise experienced violent and unjust divisions and destructive competition among nations and cultures and peoples.

Time will tell. But we can trust that somehow, some way, God's hand is in all of this in the power of the Spirit, even as sacred agency was in the mud made with Jesus' saliva that was spread on the eyes of the man born blind, the one who gained his sight through Jesus' fleshly, shocking, but merciful, loving, gracious intervention.

It may also be that the story of the man born blind gaining his sight through Jesus' mercy and washing in the pool of Siloam is a parable that points to baptism. For our purposes today, recall that clean, purified water is not required for baptism to be effective to cleanse, forgive, and to save. Rather, healing agency comes through both the power of God's word and that of the Holy Spirit. Any kind of water will do, clean or dirty, when it comes to the healing, redemptive, restorative ways of God.

May we in this time of crisis be enabled by the Word and Spirit to trust ever more deeply in the efficacy of that same Word and the Spirit. May God in Christ keep us hopeful in the confounding, paradoxical ways of God that make for healing, healing for individual persons and healing for the nations.

God bless you all. I am eager to be with you in person.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.