



Queen Anne

LUTHERAN CHURCH

Called to Proclaim God's Love in Christ for Every Person

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Thanks to these who worshiped with us: Mark Dibble, Jean Oplinger, Jennifer Jones, Meg Shaw, Jackie Thomsen, Virginia Stamey-Johnson, and Joel Matter

This service of worship can also be heard online. Go to queenannelutheran.org and click on "WORD OUT" to find both audio and print resources for worship at home.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

March 22, 2020

"Word Out #3" audio transcript

↑ Greeting

☪: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

☪: **And also with you.**

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the ninth chapter.

G: **Glory to you, O Lord.**

¹As he [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 don't 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 Judean leaders 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 he

now 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 Judean leaders; for the Judean leaders had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents had 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.”

P: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

Plague. In the 14th century it sweeps across Europe, killing an estimated 50 million people. In the 17th century, it sweeps through Italy, killing 280,000 more. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it sweeps across London and along China's eastern seaboard. And in the 20th century, what we would now call a pandemic, the Spanish Flu, *sweeps the world*, killing an estimated 500 million people around the globe, including over 600,000 in the United States, one of whom was my great grandmother.

The Plague. Not, literally at least, our present situation. But the title of a novel written in 1947 by the French philosopher Albert Camus. As Camus presents it, the plague is not merely a *situation* we can face and overcome, but a permanent *state* or condition of being human. Each of us metaphorically carries "the plague" within us by which Camus meant, according to Alain de Botton in a recent issue of the *New York Times*, a "susceptibility to sudden death, an event that can render our lives instantaneously meaningless." A pandemic like the Coronavirus simply raises to conscious awareness this chronic vulnerability to forces beyond our control. One where, Camus would say, nobody is ultimately immune.

A Man of the Cloth. One of the characters in Camus' novel is Father Paneloux, a Jesuit priest. Father Paneloux gives a sermon during the first stage of the outbreak. It is a scourge, he says, sent by God to those who have hardened their hearts. As a person of faith, he tells his listeners, you must either accept everything, including the horrors of the plague, as coming from God or believe in nothing at all. There is no in-between; you cannot pick and choose.

And that's what the Bible tells us, isn't it? "I form light and create darkness," says God in Isaiah 45:7. "I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do *all* these things."

When it comes to human suffering, therefore, the question is not *whether* God causes it but *why*. And the answer, which arcs from the story of Job, where friends of the title character attribute his suffering to something he must have done, to *The Plague* where Father Paneloux tells his audience likewise, is this: Suffering is punishment for human sin. *We* must have done something wrong. Pestilence, plagues, pandemics, all of it – *all of it* – comes from God.

It's hard, I have to say, to understate how damaging this way of thinking is, not only when people hear it directly, say, from the pulpit, but also as an implication in phrases we sometimes use to comfort one another.

Imagine being told for example by a friend from church, upon learning you have cancer, that this is somehow part of God's plan. Or hearing, after miscarrying a child, that everything happens for a reason. Tragedies like these are hard enough. Implicating God, suggesting somehow that God is responsible, only makes them worse. This is what makes John 9, our Gospel reading for today, *so important*.

The Alternative. According to John, Jesus and his disciples encounter a man blind from birth. His disciples, reflecting the view we've now described, ask Jesus what caused this man's blindness. Was it his sin, or – going back to Exodus 20:5 – the sin of his parents? Jesus, we discover, rejects both of these explanations: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," he says in verse 3, "he was born blind so that God's work might be revealed in him." Notice here what occurs: Jesus shifts the attention from speculation about the source of suffering to doing something about it. He takes an affliction that *already exists* and uses it as an opportunity for healing, what he calls a *work of God*. He proceeds accordingly to give vision to the man who was blind, providing him both *physical and spiritual* eyes with which to see.

The Gospel. This is good news, isn't it – really good news? If Jesus embodies God's will, if his work is indeed the work of God, then the message is clear: **God is not the source of suffering, pain, pestilence, plague, or death. God is the source of life and healing.** "I came that they may have life," Jesus says a chapter later, "and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b).

A Reprieve. John 9 gives people of faith who suffer a place to stand against those like Father Paneloux at the beginning of *The Plague* who claim, when it comes to God, it's all or nothing, that God is the source of both good and evil. That afflictions like blindness are somehow, say, punishment from God for sin. One final hurdle, however, remains. According to the second half of verse 3, the blind man "was born blind" so that God's work of renewal and healing might be revealed in him. "This makes it sound like God caused the blindness because God needed an occasion to show off," says Craig Koester, Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary. But that, he adds, is not what's going on.

Why? Because our translation, the otherwise "perfect" NRSV, added to the original Greek the words "he was born blind" without telling its readers, namely,

you and me. The phrase, it turns out, is not there! It should read, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but in order that the works of God might be manifest in him we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.” We cannot have a tidy, rational explanation for why, say, bad things happen to good people, Jesus seems to be suggesting. We can, however, redirect our focus to alleviating, as Jesus does, the suffering in question. Given the blindness, the cancer, the infection, the disease, **how, we might ask, is God calling us to respond**, and how might God be involved in our response?

This is where God comes in, not — I repeat, *not* — as the source of suffering, but as part of its solution, at least to the fullest extent possible given the circumstances.

Plague. In centuries past it swept across Europe, through its cities, and along China’s eastern seaboard. As we face the spread of the Coronavirus, we have no idea yet what will happen today, much less tomorrow, or in the weeks and months that lie ahead. We do know, however, something about who God is, who Christ is. As we see in John 9, Christ rejected speculation concerning why we suffer in favor of doing something about it. And you know what? That’s precisely what Camus advised. Out of love, he says in *The Plague*, we should work to ameliorate the inevitable suffering of others. “Suffering is randomly distributed, it makes no sense, it is simply absurd, and that is the kindest thing one can say of it.”

Amen.

Hymn of the Day

(See insert)

Amazing Grace, ELW 779

Prayers of the Church

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

A brief silence is given.

A: God of insight, as we find ourselves now in uncertain times, we ask that you be with all those who are struggling. Replace fear with courage, ignorance with knowledge, and total self-concern with a concern for others. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: God of insight, empower us to care for the land and all living things that dwell in it and beneath it. Provide rich soil for the crops to grow. Bring rain to lands

suffering drought. Protect hills and shorelines from damage caused by erosion.
Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

A: God of insight, bring peace to all people and nations. Inspire in our leaders a concern for people instead of power, women and men who seek goodness, righteousness, and truth on behalf of all. Frustrate the efforts of those who would seek to cause violence or terror. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

A: God of insight, you care for our needs even before we ask. Come quickly to all who seek prayer this day. People affected or infected by the coronavirus. Accomplish healing through the work of doctors, nurses, physical therapists, nutritionists, and all who tend to human bodies. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

A: God of insight, help us as a congregation to lift up the unique gifts of each person who enters, no matter their physical capacity, cognitive ability, or sensory need. Help us to be creative and brave in making our facilities and our ministries accessible to all. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

A: For who or what else do the people of God pray?

A silence is given so that your prayers may be offered.

P: Holy God, we pray for all those struggling with life-threatening illnesses, including not only the coronavirus but also members or friends or anyone in the congregation who is struggling with cancer. We pray for patience in these difficult times. We pray that you be with those who are unemployed, that you give them confidence in the future, and we pray finally for those who are traveling, particularly those who are returning to the United States. Be with them, Lord. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

A: God of insight, you call out to those who are asleep and awaken them to new life with you. We give thanks for your saints. Join us together with them as your children in this world and in the new creation thereafter.
Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

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

C: **Amen.**

Benediction

P: And now may the Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look upon you with favor,
and grant you peace.

G: Amen.

Announcements

P: Grace and peace to all of you listening, from Queen Anne Lutheran Church. We are delighted that you've joined us for this audio service, and we look forward to the time when we can worship together in person. As of this point, while our staff continues to work from home, the church remains closed to all groups for everyone's safety. I'd like to share a couple announcements regarding our life together while we are apart:

First: Worship matters. Our weekly Word Out service continues, so watch your email every Friday for the link. You can also go directly to our website and access it there, or you can visit our podcast, "Queen Anne Lutheran Podcast" for access to the service as well. For **KIDS** activities are also included with the services.

For our services we invite you, secondly, to share prayers you have with us during this time, so that we can include them in our services and online for our membership. You can email them to me, that's Pastor Dan -- email address pastor@queenannelutheran.org, or to Barb. (admin@queenannelutheran.org)

Third, we have a phone tree! Members of the congregation are helping me reach out to all of you via phone, just to check in and to see if there are any needs, especially grocery shopping and delivery.

If you have such need, and haven't heard yet from anyone, or if you'd just like to check in with me, please contact me by email.

You can also call the office (206-284-1960) for directions on how to reach me by phone.

Coming up: Stay tuned for an announcement regarding plans for Holy Week, as well as a possible Zoom coffee hour with me for anyone interested. Blessings to each of you during these challenging times.

Dismissal

A: Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

G: Thanks be to God.

Hymn of the Day

Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound ELW 779

(Stanza 1 = solo; then stanzas 3 and 5)

1 A - maz - ing grace!— how sweet the sound— that
 2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and
 3 Through man - y dan - gers, toils, and snares I
 4 The Lord has prom - ised good to me; his
 5 When we've been there ten thou - sand years, bright

saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but
 grace my fears re - lieved; how pre - cious did that
 have al - read - y come; 'tis grace has brought me
 word my hope se - cures; he will my shield and
 shin - ing as the sun, we've no less days to

now am found; was blind, but now I see.
 grace ap - pear the hour I first be - lieved!
 safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.
 por - tion be as long as life en - dures.
 sing God's praise than when we'd first be - gun.