

READINGS

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

1 Samuel 16 : 1-13

All three readings today teach us that God sees things differently from us. When Israel needed a new king to succeed the disgraced Saul, the search took Samuel to Bethlehem, and a family of brothers. The youngest, a shepherd boy, was chosen - because God had seen past the outward appearances to what he could do through King David.

Ephesians 5 : 8-14

Only God can see things as they really are, yet he allows us to share something of that vision. The Bible calls it light, the light of Christ, and because it is given to us our understanding of the world and of ourselves is illuminated.

John 9 : 1-14

This is an extended reading so that we hear the whole story. It is telling us much more than just the gift of sight to the blind; the question is, who is this man who is able to make people see things clearly?

INTRODUCTION

In the Latin Church this Sunday is often known as Laetare Sunday. Laetare means "Rejoice" in Latin, and the Introit (entrance antiphon) from the traditional liturgy is taken from Isaiah 66:10-11, which begins "Laetare, Jerusalem" ("Rejoice, O Jerusalem").

In both cases the fourth Sunday of Lent is significant shift in the observations of the liturgical season; like the third Sunday of Advent ("Gaudete Sunday"). The Fourth Sunday of Lent is a break in an otherwise penitential season. The vestments for this day may be Rose coloured as a symbolizing this shift.

PRAYERS

Collect One

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God,
that we, who for our evil deeds
do worthily deserve to be punished,
by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Collect Two

Lord God
whose blessed Son our Saviour
gave his back to the smiters
and did not hide his face from shame:
Give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time
with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Post Communion Prayer

Father,
through your goodness

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we are refreshed through your Son
in word and sacrament.
May our faith be so strengthened and guarded
that we may witness to your eternal love
by our words and in our lives.
Grant this for Jesus' sake, our Lord.

Almighty God,
You know that we have no power in ourselves
to help ourselves:
Keep us both outwardly in our bodies
and inwardly in our souls,
that we may be defended from all adversities
which may happen to the body,
and from all evil thoughts
which may assault and hurt the soul;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
1979 Book of Common Prayer

Merciful Lord, absolve your people from their offences, that through your
bountiful goodness we may all be delivered from the chains of those sins
which by our frailty we have committed; grant this, heavenly Father, for Jesus
Christ' sake, our blessed Lord and Saviour, who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. *Common
Worship*

Merciful Lord, you know our struggle to serve you: when sin spoils our lives
and overshadows our hearts, come to our aid and turn us back to you again,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. *Common Worship*

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to those who struck
him and did not hide his face from shame: give us grace to endure the
sufferings of this present time with sure confidence in the glory that shall be
revealed; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. *Methodist Worship*

O God, rich in mercy, you so loved the world that, when we were dead in our
sins, you sent your only Son for our deliverance. Lifted up from the earth he is
light and life; exalted upon the cross, he is truth and salvation. Raise us up
with Christ that we may walk as children of light. We ask this through Christ
who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, holy and mighty
God, for ever and ever. Amen. *Methodist Worship*

Source of Light, God of great mercy and love, we come to you this day seeking restoration
of our sight. Clear away our blindness, and give us a new vision of all that we can
accomplish in your name. Give us strength and confidence to truly witness to your abiding
love and faithfulness. For we offer this prayer in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Healing God, we have languished in our blindness. We have chosen to hide in darkness in
order to avoid reaching out and risking acceptance. We are afraid of the light, and yet we

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crave it. In your light, there is healing and hope, restoration and transformation. Forgive our lack of faith and our fearfulness, O Lord. Give us courage to reach out to the light and accept its healing rays. May our lives be transformed by your mercy, for we pray this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

O God, rich in mercy, you so loved the world that, when we were dead in our sins, you sent your only Son for our deliverance. Help us in this Lenten journey to embrace your truth and salvation. Call us to humility and gentleness so that we may embrace the Easter proclamation. We ask this through Christ, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, holy and mighty God, for ever and for ever. Amen.

Be our vision, Lord of our minds! Enable us to see things as you see them:

To discern in the ebb and flow of life the Providence that knows our every need before we ask.

To look upon both neighbours and enemies with compassion.

To recognise in the beggar, stranger, hungry and homeless the face of the Child of God.

To look in the mirror and see a much-loved disciple called by Christ to an abundant life.

Please, healing Christ, anoint our eyes with your salve, that we may see better than ever before and follow your way with anticipation and joy. In your name, and to your praise, we pray. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH 1

A: Through baptism, we have been made children of God. Let us, therefore, be bold to offer our prayers to the One who stoops to hear us. We pray, "Through Christ our Lord," and respond, "Amen."

A: Let us pray for the unity of the church.

P: Bountiful God, we pray for the church, present in many nations and many denominations. Restore our vision that we might see in one another the variety and bounty of your kingdom. We pray through Christ our Lord, C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for countries where the truth is suppressed.

P: God of Righteousness, as Jesus' followers suffered for speaking the truth, so do many others today. Support and uphold those who are prisoners of conscience and victims of political corruption, even as you lead us to work for their liberation. We pray through Christ our Lord, C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for all those in need of healing.

P: Merciful God, grant comfort to the suffering and health to the sick. Shore up all those who falter that, whatever their condition, your love may bring them joy. We pray through Christ our Lord, C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for the courage to speak of our faith.

P: Patient God, give us faith like that of the man born blind, that we might speak courageously of your presence with us. We pray through Christ our Lord, C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for catechumens, confirmands and all who study God's word.

P: God of Wisdom, stir up the spirits of all who seek to know you more fully, especially _____, that they might long for a clearer vision of your truth. We pray through Christ our Lord, C: Amen.

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P: We commend all for whom we pray into your care through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH 2

In peace, we pray to you, Lord 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, freedom and peace.

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 all who serve God in the church.

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

[Silence]

Hear us, Lord

for your mercy is great.

We thank you, Lord, for all the blessings of life.

[Silence]

We exalt you, O God our king;

and praise your name for ever and ever.

We give thanks for all those who have died in the peace of Christ, and for the promise of your eternal kingdom.

[Silence]

In Christ you have called us to eternal glory;

to you be praise for ever and ever. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH 3

Let us bring before the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the faces we know well, those we know a little, those on whom we have passed hasty judgement, and faces to whom we cannot put a name. And let us seek God's blessing on all.

The kindly faces who have loved and nurtured us; family, friends, neighbours and workmates, those on earth and those in heaven.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,

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And may we all see your glory

The faces of opponents who have mocked us or shunned us, abused us or betrayed us, exploited or ignored us.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,
And may we all see your glory.

The TV faces of hungry children overseas, or street kids in our cities, or aboriginal children living in squalor.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,
And may we all see your glory.

The faces of our elected politicians, State and Federal, Government and Opposition, minor parties and independents.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,
And may we all see your glory.

The glossy magazine faces of sporting idols and film stars, royalty and fashion models, and the newspaper faces of those who have fallen into public shame.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,
And may we all see your glory.

The faces of those whom we have ignored or injured, or who have been the target of our superficial judgement or gossip.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,
And may we all see your glory.

The faces of those within this church who have been an inspiration to us, and those who more often get under our skin and annoy us.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,
And may we all see your glory.

Loving God, these are all your children, cherished with a priceless love. Through each of them, and through your whole human family, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Then indeed we shall be blest beyond anything we can as yet see or imagine. Through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Amen!

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH 4

Presider or deacon

Jesus anointed the eyes of the man born blind. As we prepare for the paschal feast, let us earnestly beseech God to give new sight to all peoples everywhere.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy catholic church throughout the world, sharing the death and resurrection of Christ.

Lord, have mercy.

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters and deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Lord, have mercy.

For *NN* our catechumen(s) and *NN* their sponsors(s).

Lord, have mercy.

For all nations, peoples, tribes, clans, and families.

Lord, have mercy.

For justice, mercy, and peace in all the world.

Lord, have mercy.

For all who are sick, afflicted, or oppressed.

Lord, have mercy.

For the dying and the dead.

Lord, have mercy.

For our families, friends, and companions, and for all those we love.

Lord, have mercy.

Remembering, name of *Parish patronal*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Blessed are you, God of Samuel and David, who gives us the light of the world in Jesus the Anointed One. Receive the prayers we offer this day for those in need in every place and anoint the head of all who come to your table; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SERMON STARTERS

1. The story of the Prodigal Son is one that often stirs many emotions for those of us on the journey. In reading the The Prodigal Son we meet a person who is given his total freedom while retaining the assurance of the Father's unconditional love. Despite the love of the father here, the humility of the prodigal before his half-blind and aged father is stunning when you consider he comes back to the Father bankrupt and hopeless. Perhaps the lesson for us is that this is the key to restoration. The Lenten journey calls us to this but at the same time we must come to terms with the fact that not everyone chooses to take this step.

Some have suggested that the real title for this Gospel account should be "The Parable of the Lost Sons," for the elder son, in not understanding either his father's character or his own privileged status as the obedient son, is in many ways more lost than the erring prodigal. The favor that comes to the prodigal comes as a result of his remembering what his father was like. The elder son could not see the point at all. Given our tendency to judge others, we need to be very thoughtful about how we receive this story in our own journey.

2. The soul united to God and transformed in him draws from within God a divine breath, much like the most high God himself. And God, abiding in the soul, breathes forth the life of the soul as its exemplar. --- [St. John of the Cross](#)

3. On this Sunday perhaps two relational disciplines are worth considering

A. Making a point of contact with those who have mothered/nurtured us on our spiritual journey and making acts of gratitude and appreciation

B. Take some time looking at Rembrandt's painting of the Prodigal Son and consider reading the short book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*.

See: <http://www.eprodigals.com/Henry-Nouwen-Prodigal/Henry-Nouwen-Return-Prodigal.html>

WEB SOURCES

The Text this Week

<http://www.textweek.com/year4/lenta4.htm>

www.churchnewsireland.org

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John Pridmore in The Church Times on This Week's Readings

<http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=52715>

There was a man born blind

By Dean Sam Candler of Atlanta Cathedral. Traditional narrative retelling of the Gospel.

http://day1.org/1085-there_was_a_man_born_blind

Two sermons by Bruce Prewer. One looks at the various people involved with the man born blind - his parents, those around him, and Jesus

<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocA/23LENT4.htm>

Sermons that Work

Nice linkages of the ministry of Samuel and his identification of David with Jesus and the man born blind. Good quotes from Walter Brueggemann who stated that the task of interpretation is to "transpose ancient voices into contemporary voices of authority," and to recognize the power of the Word to generate transformation in our own world and society. In choosing David as king, Brueggemann maintains, the Lord overturns the established order.

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons_that_work_57746_ENG_HTM.htm