



seeking: Who sinned?

March 19, 2023 + Fourth Sunday in Lent

*An asterisk * invites you to stand in body or in spirit, and you are invited to read aloud responses found in **bold**.*

We welcome you to First Lutheran Church!

we GATHER here

We prepare for worship, wanting our eyes to be opened to a life in Christ, in which we “walk in love,” and forgive “with kind and gentle hearts.”

Prelude — “Awake, O Sleeper, Rise from Death”

Hymnal Setting
Vocal Quartet

***Welcome and Words of Gathering**

Scripture is full of questions...**Where are you?**

Am I my brother’s keeper? **Whom shall I send?**

Who do you say that I am? **Who sinned?**

How many times shall I forgive? **If God is for us, who can be against us?**

Scripture is full of questions,

so just like those in our scriptures, may we bring our full curiosity and wonder into this space. **Let us ask and seek after our merciful God.**

***Gathering Hymn** —

“Christ, You Made the Blind Man See”

Sung to the tune NUN KOMM, DER HEIDEN HEILAND

*For our **Gathering Hymn** we sing a tune - typically sung only during the Advent season - with these new words. We set up the gospel by singing about the blind man healed by Jesus, which really upset the religious authorities.*

All: Christ, you made the blind man see;
with some mud you healed his eyes.
So you acted lovingly,
bringing health and changing lives.

High: Yet it was a Sabbath Day;
rules were all that some folks saw;
They were quick to scorn the way
you put love before the Law.

All: Christ, you came to judge the earth,
bringing truth and life and light,
Showing humble ones their worth,
giving vision, bold and bright.

Low: Those who proudly think they see
are the ones who often find
Though they act quite boastfully,
they, in fact, are really blind.

Choir: God, we pray that we will be
people filled with light and grace.
Show us what we need to see
in this culture, time and place:

All: We are called to be your light,
telling how you've changed us here.
Love can make the darkness bright;
faith in you makes all things clear.

*Confession and Forgiveness

In today's text, the disciples ask Jesus, "Who sinned?" They want to know who around them could be blamed for suffering. The disciples want to identify who around them had done wrong. In confession, we stop pointing fingers at others. In confession, we turn our attention toward ourselves and invite God into that honest and vulnerable space. So do this counter-cultural thing with me today. Let us pray:

Who here has sinned?

We have sinned. We put our heads in the sand. We ignored people in need. We make false assumptions and fail to be kind. We are in need of forgiveness.

Good news! Our God is a merciful God. God does not punish, hold grudges, or keep score. When you suffer, God weeps. When you sin, God forgives. When you lose your way, God comes running. In Jesus' name ✝, your sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God for a love like that.

Have you sinned?

I have sinned. I put my head in the sand. I ignore people in need. I make false assumptions and fail to be kind. I, too, am in need of forgiveness.

Good news! Our God is a merciful God. God does not punish, hold grudges, or keep score. When you suffer, God weeps. When you sin, God forgives. When you lose your way, God comes running. In Jesus' name ✝, your sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God for a love like that. **Amen.**

*Prayer of the Day

May God be with you. **And also with you.** Let us pray.

God of Good news, **there is reading your word, there is hearing your word, and then there is tunneling ourselves into your word—harvesting your word, building a home in your word, laying your word over us like a blanket, wrapping ourselves in your word, know your word like the back of our hand, singing your word, planting ourselves like a garden in your word.** God, we could listen to scripture like we listen to the news, or we could cocoon ourselves in your word and it could change us entirely. **So bundle us up. Give us the latter. We want to know you. With hopeful hearts we pray, amen.**

we LISTEN and RESPOND

A Reading from the first book of Samuel — 1 Samuel 16:1-13

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Jesse made seven of his

sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Hear these words of old **as we seek to know God today.**

Psalm 23 is so familiar that it is sometimes difficult to really “hear” it. Why do you think it was chosen as a response to the reading from Samuel? Do you hear anything new in the choral version?

Psalm 23

“Psalm 23”

Setting by Michael Myrick
Bonse Aba Singers; Brenda McHugh, piano

A Reading from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians — Ephesians 5:8-14

Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Hear these words of old **as we seek to know God today.**

*Gospel Acclamation — no. 918 from *All Creation Sings*

Now is the time of grace, now is the day of sal - va - tion.

Turn now, and seek God’s face, now be-hold God’s in-vi - ta - tion.

*Gospel — John 9:1-41

The Gospel of John, the 9th chapter.

Glory to you, O God.

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 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?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He 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.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then 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.” Some 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. So 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.”

The Jews 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 and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

So 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.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He 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?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. Jesus 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.” Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

The Gospel of Jesus.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon — “So Many Questions!”

Pastor Ted Kunze

***Hymn** — *from A Sanctified Art*

“We Come with Questions”
Sung to the tune LOBE DEN HERREN

*In this hymn,
there are many
references to
human-made
rules and order.
Are you ever
frustrated when
you want
something to be
black and white,
but you discover a
whole lot of gray?
May we rest in
the knowledge
that “God works
beyond rules and
boundaries” and
puts love first.*

**We come with questions
assuming that there will be answers,
setting the world in an order
that obeys our grammar.
We want to know
where Spirit’s river will flow,
frustrated by her meanders.**

**Here is the myst’ry we claim
as the foll’wers of Jesus:
Christ has died, Christ is raised,
Christ daily comes to redeem us.
Grace free, not earned,
whether or not we deserve.
God works beyond rules and
boundaries.**

**God help us live into
myst’ry beyond comprehension.
Quiet our minds, always
clamoring for some direction.
Give us your peace
with all that we can’t perceive,
holding us within the tension.**

*Affirmation of Faith

P: You are invited to share in this affirmation of our faith:

We believe in a merciful God,

**a God who does not keep score,
a God who wants good for us.**

We believe in a creative God,

**a God who would heal with mud,
a God capable of seeing what we cannot.**

We believe in a saving God,

**a God who heals,
a God who greets our questions with patience,
a God who sends us out with hope in our step.**

What wondrous love is this. Amen.

*Prayers of Intercession

A: Sustained by God's abundant mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of creation.

Eternal God, you seal us by the Holy Spirit and mark us with the cross of Christ forever in baptism. Inspire us by your love as together we strive for justice and peace in all the earth. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Creating God, by your word you have made all things, and you hate nothing you have made. Teach us to perceive the intrinsic value of your creation, from the grandest mountain range to the smallest springtime bud. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Powerful God, you anoint kings and establish rulers. Guide the work of heads of state and elected officials. Encourage them to lead with justice and to remove barriers that impede the well-being of all. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Shepherding God, you lead us beside still waters and restore our souls. Keep watch over those who weep; tend all who are sick and comfort those who grieve. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

God our host, you fill us at your table with more than we could ever ask. Feed us with hunger for justice. Equip the feeding ministries of this congregation and community. Nourish us so we can nourish our neighbors. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your steadfast love and your promise to renew your whole creation; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

The family of the man born blind was a Jewish family, wanting to follow the customs and traditions they knew. This Jewish poem talks of ongoing faithfulness, even when we do not see, feel, or hear.

Offering

Music During Offering

"I Believe in the Sun"

Setting by Margaret Tucker

Bonse Aba Singers; Brenda McHugh, piano

I believe in the sun even when it is not shining.

I believe in love even when I do not feel it.

I believe in God even when God is silent.

-Anonymous Jewish

***Offering Prayer**

A: God of goodness and growth, all creation is yours, and your faithfulness is sure. Receive the gifts we bring, and nourish us to proclaim your abiding love in our communities and in the world, through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song. Amen.

we SHARE the meal

***The Great Thanksgiving** — pg. 161, *front of hymnal*

***Sanctus** — pg. 162, *front of hymnal*

***Words of Institution and Prayers**

P: God of the lost and the found, surely it is right for us to give our thanks and praise; for day after day we look for you, and day after day we find you: in the laughter of children, in the sun rising over the horizon, in the flowers of spring.

Our seeking does not go unanswered, and for that we are grateful. So first and foremost, we come to you in prayer to say thank you, for when we're seeking beauty, you give us mountains and freckles, green eyes and brown eyes. When we're looking for reason to hope, you give us rainbows after the storm, and candles flickering in the window. When we're seeking peace, you give us three part harmony and the sound of the rain. And when we're seeking justice, your life reminds us that everyone is welcome at your Table, and none shall be turned away.

For all these reminders we are deeply grateful. And yet, gracious God, our seeking does not stop. For even though your fingerprints are all over this world, we are not yet at your promised day.

So in addition to our gratitude, we also pray today for conviction. Do not let us get comfortable with half-hearted seeking. Do not let us grow numb to the suffering of this world. Make us relentless in our pursuit of justice—relentless in our consoling of the grieving, in our welcoming of the stranger, and in the feeding of the hungry. Like a dog with a scent, may we walk toward your kingdom, never giving up, never wandering off the path.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

And as we see and as we seek, pour out your Spirit on this ordinary bread and cup. May this meal be the nourishment we need to continue seeking you in the world.

Until your promised day, we will pray. Until your promised day, we will seek, saying: **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

*Invitation to the Table

P: Friends, if your seeking has led you here,
if your weary heart followed breadcrumbs all the way to this sanctuary,
then I have good news: you do not have to seek anymore.

This table is God's Table.
So if you came here looking for justice,
then rest in the comfort that all will be fed here.
If you came seeking beauty,
then let your spirit marvel at the beauty of a community coming together.
If you came seeking a brush with the Divine,
then know that God is present in this ordinary meal.
So kick off your walking shoes. Let your weary heart stop the search.
We are standing on holy ground. This is God's Table.
All are invited. Come.

*We will observe
continuous
communion this
morning as we
sing perhaps one
of the most
familiar hymns,
known across
denominations
and even faith
traditions.
Instead of
pointing fingers
and blaming
others, how
might we show
the kind of grace
sung about in this
hymn?*

*While our
Sending Hymn
references
Christ's acts of
healing, it also
calls on us to
"create new
hearts in us" and
offers a prayer
that our church
may be "a servant
church" that
always puts love
first.*

*This original song
lifts up the story
of the blind man
and being able to
see and follow the
light of the world.*

Distribution of Communion

Lamb of God — pg. 164, front of hymnal

Hymn — no. 779

"Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound!"

Prayer After Communion

P: God of manna and mustard seeds, we came to this Table hungry
and we leave feeling full—full of hope, full of promise, full of what could be.

For we not only found glimpses of you at this Table, but we caught a glimpse of the way
things could be: in a meal where all are welcomed and all are fed.

Is there anything holier than that?

Thank you for nourishing our curiosity alongside our spirit and our conviction.

May we always seek you the way you seek after us.

With grateful hearts we pray, amen.

we DEPART to serve the world

Announcements

***Sending Hymn** — see back page

"O Christ, Your Heart, Compassionate"

*Blessing & Dismissal

P: As you leave this place, may God bless you with seeking.

Seek out the hungry. Seek the weary. Seek the good in every person you pass.

Seek out the hopeful. Seek the faithful. Seek God in each of us.

As you seek and as you wonder, may you find what you are looking for.

A: In the name of our loving God, who is always seeking us, go now in peace. **Amen.**

***Postlude** — "Light of the World"

Steve Kidder

Acknowledgements

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https://carolynshymns.com/christ_you_made_the_blind_man_see.html

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Worship Assistants

Pastor: Chris Culuris

Director of Music: Emily Bruflat

Substitute Pastor: Ted Kunze

Assisting Minister: Isabel Avant

Audio/Video: Finely Olson, Rachel Ribar

Greeter: Maren Swenson, Ivy McHugh

Reader: Malcolm McHugh

Acolytes: Nihla Hoenke, Harley Samuelson

Musicians: Bonse Aba Singers; Vocal Quartet: Sharon

Malm, Aileen Bipes, Ellis Jones, Harvey Kane; Steve Kidder

Communion Preparers: Stelters

Communion Servers: Sharon Domeier

Bread Bakers: Diane Stewart

Ushers:

Announcements

- Refreshments will be served today after worship by the Fellowship Committee.
- Our final class preparing our youth for their first Holy Communion is meeting tonight, 6:30pm, in the Dining Hall.
- Interested in joining a festival choir for Holy Week and Easter? We are looking for several more singers! Please consider joining on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. following worship. The choir will sing Passion Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. Contact Emily at musicflcstp@gmail.com for more information!
- Join us for Soup Supper on March 22 from 5:30-6:30pm in the Dining Hall. Worship service will follow at 7:00pm.
- Next Sunday, March 26, will be Pack the Pews Sunday. We will be culminating our March efforts to provide food and household items for the St. Peter area food shelf. If you are able, please bring contributions and place them in the back pews of the church where items brought earlier this month will already be in place.
- Following worship next Sunday, we will gather in the Dining Hall to continue our series *Making Sense of Luther*.
- ISAIAH and its sister organization Faith in Minnesota is planning a "Day at the Capitol" on 3/22. A bus will transport folks from the St. Peter/Mankato area. You will be able to speak with our local legislators. Contact Ellen Conover for more information about this event: markellenconover@gmail.com / 507-317-0358.

Prayers

- We pray for the family and friends of Sandra Brovold who died on Feb. 19th.
- We pray for the family of Myrene Bunge who died on February 19.
- We pray for Margie Nelsen, Pr. Bill's wife, who died on Feb. 22nd. A memorial service will be held at Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Peter, on Saturday, March 25 at 11:00 a.m.; visitation at the church will be on Friday, March 24, 4-7pm.
- We lift up prayers for those on our long-term list: Elgene Lund, Chuck Petry, Bob Cady, Joan Williams, Betty Gustafson, Glenn Stryker, Erika Schuldt, Ursula McRostie, Karen Wendroth, Allen Storkson, Gene Roemhildt, Karen Smithers, Paul Aasen, Shirley Storkson, Rita Ogren, Dorothy Lutz, Claire Cardwell, and Ella Twaddle.



1. O — Christ, your heart, com - pas - sion - ate, bore ev - 'ry hu - man pain.
2. As once you wel - comed those cast down and healed the sick, the blind,
3. O — Christ, cre - ate new — hearts in us that beat in time with yours,
4. O — Love that made the — dis - tant stars, yet marks the spar-row's fall,



Its — beat - ing was the pulse of God; its breadth God's vast do-main.
so — may all bruised and bro - ken lives through us your help still find.
that, — joined by faith with your great heart, be - come love's o - pen doors.
whose arms stretched wide up - on a cross em - brace and bear us all:



The heart of God, the heart of Christ com-bined in per - fect rhyme
Lord, join our hearts with those who weep that none may weep a - lone,
We are your bod - y, — ris - en Christ; our hearts, our hands we yield
come, make your church a — ser - vant church that walks your ser - vant ways,



to — write God's love in — hu - man deeds, e - ter - ni - ty in time.
and — help us bear an - oth - er's pain as though it were our own.
that — through our life and min - is - try your love may be re - vealed.
whose deeds of love rise up to you, a sac - ri - fice of praise!