

3/2/08

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

Gracious Father, in Your Son Jesus Christ we see that You are the God whose transforming presence turns chaos to order, darkness to light, blindness to sight, brokenness to health, and death to life. Open our hearts to receive the gracious gift of Your presence, that our lives may show Your power, through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Isaiah 42:14-21 page

(The prophet describes the unbelief of God's people and how the Lord has sought to bring them into His light.)

14 "For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant. 15 I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools. 16 I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.

17 But those who trust in idols, who say to images, 'You are our gods,' will be turned back in utter shame. 18 "Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! 19 Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD? 20 You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing." 21 It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious.

THE EPISTLE LESSON Ephesians 5:8-14. page

(St. Paul reminds us that we are lights of Christ in the dark world of sin and death.)

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible,

14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

THE GOSPEL LESSON John 9:1-17, 34-41 page

(Jesus heals a man born blind and reveals a darkness only His light can overcome.)

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.

2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in

the world, **I am the light of the world.**"

6 Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 7 "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." 10 "How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded.

11 He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." 12 "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14 Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. 15 Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided.

17 Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." . . .

34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. 35 **Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him,** he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 **Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.** 39 Jesus said, "**For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.**" 40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" 41 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

INTRO - This year our Confirmation Class is studying about being mature Christians. We've studied about believing, about growing, about serving, and most recently sharing, sharing Jesus with others.

We read 1 Peter 3:15 which says, **'In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.'** So, last weekend we made lists about right and wrong ways to share Jesus with others using words. One of those was how do we share in ways that are obnoxious and rude. Another was how do we share Jesus respectfully and gently?

But, we didn't stop there, we also made a list that reflected another kind of witnessing. Matthew 5:16 says, **'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.'** We made another set of lists about sharing Jesus. These lists had to do with using our actions and our lives to share God's love in Jesus with others. You see, it is not just words, and not just actions, it is both.

I. In our lesson for today we see Jesus share the love of God with someone who did not know Him, and did not believe in Him. But, Jesus did not just use His Words, and did not just use His actions. He patiently used both.

A. A couple of weeks ago I told you that our Gospel lessons in John would be looking at Jesus sharing God's love with unbelievers.

1. A couple of weeks ago, Nicodemus first came to Jesus at night, and Jesus worked to share God's love so the Holy Spirit could bring Him to Faith.
2. Last week, instead of the Samaritan woman coming to Jesus, in an act of mercy Jesus himself went to this woman who needed forgiveness and love, and she came to faith, with her whole town.
3. This week we see Jesus reaching out to a blind man.

B. Please note the different ways Jesus shares love.

1. First, we do not hear the blind man asking to be healed, but Jesus made a point to stop, to put mud on his eyes, and to heal him.
2. Jesus did not just talk about love, he first showed it with this wonderful miracle.
3. This made enough of an impression that when the man was questioned by the religious leaders of the day, he declared Jesus was a prophet, not the messiah, not the Son of God, not the Savior, but still a prophet.

C. But, then Jesus shares God's love again, this time with words of instruction and invitation.

1. Jesus finds the man, after he has been thrown out of the synagogue, asks if he believes in the Son of Man, and tells the man that He, Jesus, is that Son of Man, the Messiah.
2. Because of Jesus' verbal witness, a witness which was patient and gentle and which was not a one time witness but an on-going witness, the man ultimately believed and worshiped Jesus.
3. We are told **38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.**

D. God calls us to share His love with our actions and words.

II. When I was in St. Louis we had a wonderful, strange member named Otis Woodard. The

first time we met Otis he made quite an impression on my mom and Kathy's mom. Otis was a black man who lived in the inner city where our church was. He attended my installation with a bright dashiki, and a 12" knife at his side. Boy did our parents' eyes bug out. By the way, Otis became an Elder in our church, and CPH sold 'Otis dolls.'

But, Otis spent his life helping the needy and those needing God's love in the city. Out of his home he collected and shared food, firewood, money when he had it. The police would seek his help, and he helped Kathy and I. One time when our youth were helping Otis I asked him how he spoke the Gospel. Otis basically said, I don't talk about Jesus much, I let my actions speak. He and I discussed a need to follow up acts of kindness with words of God.

- A. It seems that for most of us, we can love with our actions, or speak words, but we sometimes fail in doing both with our sharing of God's love.
 - 1. In all honesty, while we all are somewhat shy of talking about God, I believe it is how we live that often gives a bad witness.
 - 2. There is no one here who has not at one time or another, given a bad or ineffective witness to Jesus. When we say we are Christian, and then others see us action in unloving and unfaithful ways, that is a bad witness.
- B. Sometimes though, our verbal witness fails too.
 - 1. Sometimes we fail to talk about Jesus.
 - 2. But, when in our verbal witness we force ourselves on others, by arguing, or not listening, or being impatient with the work of the Holy Spirit, that can be considered rude, and rude is always ineffective.
- C. The reason we struggle with our witness, is that we struggle with life.
 - 1. There is a constant battle between the Spirit and our sinful nature going on in our lives.
 - 2. Jesus talks about that struggle in today's lesson. In verse 39 He says, "**For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.**"
 - 3. We all struggle with our sinful nature, and unfortunately, that struggle sometimes compromises our witness.

III. Thankfully, faith in others does not come by believing in us, but saving faith is found by believing in Jesus, who forgives sinners like us.

- A. Our job is not only to be loving in words or actions, but to point people to Jesus, whose life is perfect, whose love still saves.
 - 1. People need to know that Jesus acted in love for sinners, by living, dying, and rising for them. We can share that with our words. They need to understand.
 - 2. When we are loving our actions can point others to our God, who loves us. I saw that love of God in our world today this last Friday night. I'll tell you about that later.
 - 3. When we fail, our confession, repentance, and change of life can point others go God.
- B. But, please remember, God is still speaking and working today.

1. God speaks today so all can hear through His Word. Many of you also hear him throughout the week as you read Scriptures.
2. God speaks and acts today through the Lord's Supper where he gives Himself, His very body and blood, to strengthen and forgive us.
3. In a couple of weeks we will have some baptisms, and God will be acting to invite and forgive, and call people to Himself in love as His children.

CONCLUSION - One of the ways I find to witness is my chaplain duties. Now, these visits are not to be a way to win people to our congregation, but I also don't have to deny my faith as I care for others, so 3 times or so a week I visit everyone in the hospital. This week I had an experience much like one I often have. When I told a patient who I was, they told me they weren't into religion. I listened. I asked how they were doing, and I said I'd be back. The person then replied, 'Well, I'm not against acts of kindness.' So, return I did, and we actually talked some about the love of God.

I'm not sure how the Holy Spirit will use this witness, but it is important to know that God does call us to share His love with our actions and our words, in continued witnessing that trusts that God can work faith by His Word, His Spirit, and His Sacraments.