

# *Order of Worship*

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, July 26, 2020

WELCOME

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 105:1-4

One: O give thanks to the Lord, call on God's name, make known  
God's deeds among the peoples!

**All: Sing to the Lord, sing praises!**

**Tell of all God's wonderful works!**

One: Glory in God's holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the  
Lord rejoice!

**All: Seek the Lord and his strength; seek the Lord's presence  
continually!**

HYMN 98

*To God Be the Glory*

TO GOD BE THE GLORY

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 5:8-14

HYMN 206

*I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light*

HOUSTON

SCRIPTURE

John 9:1-11

MESSAGE

*As Clear as Clay*

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 454

*Open My Eyes, That I May See*

OPEN MY EYES

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

About 15 years ago I was seeking a job. I was restricted to working while our two sons slept at night, and I found an ad in the newspaper seeking someone with good communication skills and a clean driving record to work evenings for the Lion's Club. My dad has been a Lion for many decades, so I knew the good work that they do in helping people who are blind. I envisioned a job driving to evening Lion's Club meetings and giving motivational presentations. I called the number on the ad and was asked to bring my resume and meet at a coffee shop where he would describe the details to me.

When we met at the coffee shop and he described the position, I realized I had not "seen" correctly at all. My interviewer explained that they needed an Ocular Procurement Technician. It involved being on call so that when an organ donor passes away, I would be paged to report to the hospital room, morgue, or funeral home in a 90 mile radius at night by myself, examine and prepare the dead body for cornea transplant protocols, and surgically remove the corneas for transplant or eyeballs for research. I quickly assured him that I was not qualified for this responsibility that I found both overwhelming and frightening. He countered, "I'd like to call you the next time I'm paged, and you can observe the 2-3 hour procedure. If you don't faint, you have the job."

A week or so later I ended up staying on my feet and was sent to the Univ. of MN for specific training. Intense fear gripped me every time my pager went off, not knowing how many body bags I would need to unzip to find the right donor, or if the donor would be a young person who felt ultimate hopelessness or a young baby whose heart couldn't be fixed. After scrubbing and donning all the surgical garb, I had to hold back my tears so they would not break the sterile field. Once I got home, the flashbacks and feelings that flooded me often kept me from sleeping for days.

I was ready to quit, until I started getting emails from the man who hired and helped train me. They said things like "the corneas you removed have been successfully transplanted into a mother who is able to see her three children for the first time" and "because of your

work that night, a 9 year old boy who was blinded in a softball accident can now see again.”. Despite the intensity of my fears and tears, I eventually saw with new eyes that this was God’s way of calling me to use my gift of vision to restore the vision of others.

When we hear the story of the man born blind healed by Jesus, our focus is often on the fact that it is an amazing miracle. Add the fact that Jesus used spit and clay, and I immediately think of how odd and unsterile that remedy is. Granted, some types of clay are still used to bring soothing relief to irritated skin. In Jesus’ day, pagans believed that spit contained healing properties.

Jesus knew that vision and understanding needed to be healed in more people than the blind man. One group is the doubtful neighbors who are concerned with mistaken identity – will they see the truth that not only is their blind, begging neighbor miraculously healed, but that the healer is Jesus, God in the flesh, who has come to heal and save them too? Another group is the Pharisees, whose ironic blindness is almost comical as you read the rest of chapter 9 for the full story. Sometimes we act like them too, and Jesus confronts their lack of vision and abundance of pride with the zinger in verse 41, *“If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”*

And then there are the disciples, who start off the story by asking whether the man’s blindness was caused by his sin or his parent’s sin. Jesus had to clear things up for them – it is neither! Many of us as Jesus’ disciples need reminding that suffering is not always the direct result of sin. We must push against our tears, fears, and false assumptions – just as I had to in my job procuring and preparing corneas and eyeballs - so we can truly see and treat each person as God’s beloved child. As we do this, we will begin to see lives and relationships rebuilt and reshaped as the Creator once again takes clay and makes a new life.

When we talk about vision, we could be referring to it in either a literal or metaphorical sense. Both types of vision need two things – light and clarity. In the passage from Ephesians 5, we are reminded that Christ shines on us as we learn and do what is pleasing to the

Lord. We are to live, see, and walk as children of the Light. The passage from our Call to Worship, from Psalm 105, reminds us of the clarity and focus essential to being able to see: *“Seek the Lord and his strength; seek the Lord’s presence continually!”* Is our vision guided by Christ’s constant presence and reliance on God’s strength?

We often rely on looking for human strength and success rather than seeking Christ’s supernatural presence and strength. The prophet Samuel struggled with this too. In 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16, God sends Samuel out to identify and anoint the next king of Israel to replace King Saul who was starting to show signs of pride that goes before a fall. God tells Samuel one of Jesse’s sons will be the next king, and the eldest son Eliab seems like an obvious choice to Samuel. But God says, *“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 outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”* (1 Sam. 16:7). Samuel continues to look at the next six brothers as being potential kings based on their suave looks and strong muscles. And God has to keep telling Samuel that he is missing it. Finally, Samuel asks Jesse if there are any other sons not present. Sure enough, the youngest of Jesse’s eight sons is out watching the sheep. When Samuel sees this young shepherd named David, God says, *“Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.”* (v. 12).

We also rely too much on our human assumptions, pride, or fears which blind our sight. But Christ calls us close and offers to heal our sight in unexpected ways so we can see people and circumstances with Christ’s divine eyes of grace and truth. Where or how is Christ sending you to take a step of faith, despite your fears, tears, and assumptions when life feels as clear as clay? As you take those steps, the Great Physician will also give you new sight, new compassion, and an eternal perspective.