

Lent 4 March 15, 2026

Unfortunately, we saw last week here in Vermont the same violence and disregard for the rule of law that we have seen take place across our nation in recent months. Agents from Immigration Customs Enforcement attempted to make an arrest in South Burlington and ended up causing chaos and risk to many of the neighbors, including the children at a nearby school. The ICE agents ended up using tear gas, flash bang munitions and rubber bullets on supporters who came out to protest and witness the actions of the agents. A clergywoman I know, Rabbi Grace Odell, was present. When I saw her a couple of days later as we marched in Burlington, she was still very shaken and distressed by the treatment from these federal officers. The Police Chief in South Burlington said the conduct of the federal agents was unprofessional, unplanned and unprepared, and as he summed it up, this is not how we would go about it as law enforcement in South Burlington. And so we see right here in our Brave Little State the same violence and terror that has been unleashed in other parts of our nation. Please keep Rabbi Grace and all who were attacked and traumatized in your prayers.

Prayer: Most merciful and glorious God, your Word enlightens our hearts and gives rest to our souls; may we live more fully by your Word as we share the Good News of your reign. This we ask in the Name of Jesus our Savior and friend. Amen.

Last week and then again this morning we hear long passages from John's Gospel. Last Sunday, the lesson was about Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. As we heard last week, this relatively disreputable woman is transformed by her encounter with Jesus and she becomes the first missionary apostle, yes a woman was the first apostle, and she brings many of the Samaritan people to encounter Jesus and their lives are changed too. We saw in that lesson how Jesus reaches over boundaries, he reaches out to a woman, who is also a foreigner and of a questionable background, and in crossing those boundaries Jesus changes the lives of many by first changing one.

Today, in an even longer story from John's Gospel we have another story about the transformative power we encounter in Jesus. In this story there is a lot of seeking to put blame on others. Trying to understand why this man is blind, seems to first be about who is to blame for this disability, is it his fault or the fault of his parents. This seeking to find the source of the blame implies that somehow the fault will show that God has acted rightly in making this person sightless. But Jesus sees the situation differently: this physical blindness is easily overcome,

simply some spit, some mud and a cleansing, that's all there is to it. Jesus heals a blind beggar, a man forced to the margins of society by his disability, but this simple healing, a gracious act becomes much more than that, it becomes a site of controversy between Jesus and the religious authorities of his day about Jesus' identity and mission. The questions of whether Jesus is the Messiah for Israel, and what Jesus is trying to accomplish become a focus throughout this long story. For you and me, too, as disciples and as we move in to these final weeks of Lent this year, we do well to focus our spiritual lives on Jesus and his mission.

So who is Jesus for us and what is Jesus doing that makes a difference in our lives? One way of looking at this question is looking again to the Gospel lesson from John this morning; it is a lesson about sight: how do we see and what do we see? Once the man blind from birth obtains his sight, those who know him no longer recognize him. They are blind to the miracle as simple as it is, blind to the power of God in their midst, unable to see the incredible transformation that has taken place right before their eyes. But for the one to whom sight was given, he sees fully, he tells the truth of what he is given. This one is able to see Jesus as a prophet and to see that Jesus is from God, sharing God's divinity. And maybe that's the point: like the Samaritan woman, this man blind for birth is transformed through his encounter with Jesus. Now he has the sight he lacked before. No longer condemned to be a beggar, he can start to lead a normal life. But just like the disciples could not accept that Jesus can reach over boundaries and lift up the lowly, those who see this formerly blind man remain blinded to the possibilities that Jesus brings to our lives. They cannot see the love of God manifest in the one who brings healing and transformation into their world. This man born blind had been an outcast in their world and despite the change in his life, the transformation of his life through his encounter with Jesus, the religious authorities persist in their blindness and cast him out, once again to be marginalized in their society.

But of course, the story does not end there: Jesus comes once again to this man who was blind from birth. Jesus comes to him again and although he has been driven out, cast off to the margins of society, once again Jesus crosses that boundary, once again Jesus reaches out in love so that the man born blind can see more deeply than those who have seen all their lives. And seeing Jesus, knowing that Jesus has touched him and healed him with the power of God, the formerly blind man speaks the truth once more: he said, "Lord, I believe." That simple

confession, that truth telling, sets him on the live of faith and brings him home as a child of God.

Today we also are given the familiar words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. These familiar and comforting words once again speak to us of God's loving kindness and care for our souls and for the world God has made. We are given once again that lovely image of God as our shepherd, the one who cares for us and protects us, the one who provides for our needs and blesses us with the abundance of God's good gifts, so that we shall not want, so that we shall be given rest and so that even in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death we need not fear any evil as God our Good shepherd is with us as a comfort and support. These words of this familiar psalm of David's serve to strengthen and encourage us in our faith, as we walk in God's ways and seek to carry out God's sacred mission of reconciliation in our world.

As I mentioned, we are coming to the closing weeks of Lent, this special period of forty days set aside in our Christian year to deepen our faith before we enter into the time of the holy mysteries as we remember and re-live the passion and resurrection of Jesus during Holy Week and leading up to Easter. That is why these two scriptural passages we hear this morning are so important to us now. These two passages speak to us of the transforming power of Jesus' loving encounter in the world and the care of God for our lives, even in the troubled times which we now face. As we continue our walk in faith this year, we are invited to have our eyes opened through this encounter with Jesus. It is an encounter that will change us: now seeing Jesus as fully embodying the love of God, we are called to speak the truth as well. Just like the man who is given his sight confesses his belief in Jesus as the anointed one of God, so we are called to tell the truth for our lives as well. We are called to confess our own need for God's loving and healing touch to bind up our wounds. But just as importantly, we are called to recognize the need for God's transformative love throughout our world, and then as those who have been given this sight and the truth to tell, we are further called to bring this love to the world through our loving service to those who are outcast in our times. We are called to serve the poor and the homeless, to bind up the wounds of those who have been left at the margins of society, whether through the crisis of addiction, poverty, lack of education or disability. No matter what the cause, the sight of God's love and the transformative aspect of that love move us to reach out, just as Jesus reaches out to cross over the social divisions in his day. But we do this as a people shepherded in our lives by God's

loving kindness, knowing that, "Surely God's goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our life." As Jesus is God's anointed one, so we too are anointed by God's love and indeed our cup runs over in the abundance of that love.

Once again, we come to the moment where we gather together in this walk in faith, gather together around this table as Jesus' disciples to be fed with the true bread that gives life to the world. As we prayed at the beginning of our worship, may we be blessed that God would, "evermore give us this bread, that Christ may live in us and that we may live in Christ." May Christ continue to grant us the healing touch of love that reaches across the boundaries of our world that we are able to reach out our hands in loving response. Thanks be to God for this amazing grace we are given in Jesus our savior. Amen.