

Call to Worship

Creator, Giver of Life, God who calls us together.

What do you see as you look at this group gathered for worship today?

Do you see our whole beings, our flaws and our features,
our triumphs and our disasters?

**Do you see us as we are, as we would like to be seen,
or something different altogether?**

God who names and claims us as your own, God who meets us in our baptism,
Help us see ourselves as you see us, beloved and full of promise.

God who challenges us to love our neighbours, families, friends, and enemies,
Help us to see the world as you see it, beloved and full of promise.

As we worship today, open our eyes to see Jesus;
our teacher, guide, and role model.

[Worship Offerings](#) for March 19, 2023 – Lent 4A.

Hymn

Open my eyes that I may see

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1. Open my eyes, that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me;
place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see;
open my eyes: illumine me,
Spirit divine!

2. Open my ears, that I may hear
voices of truth thou sendest clear,
and while the wave-notes fall on my ear,
everything false will disappear.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see;
open my ears: illumine me,
Spirit divine!

3. Open my mouth, and let me bear
gladly the warm truth everywhere;
open my heart, and let me prepare
love with thy children thus to share.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see;
open my heart: illumine me,
Spirit divine!

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Gracious God, who created us in God's own image,
we are grateful for all that you have done for us,
for all that you are doing in us, and for all that you will do through us.
Open our eyes to see your presence among us,

moving in powerful ways at all times and in all places.

Open our ears to hear familiar words in new ways— ways that will change us and challenge us to become the people you created us to be.

Grant us the power and the courage to come out of the darkness and into the light of Jesus Christ, that we may serve you by serving others.

We love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Forgiving God, in a world filled with so much pain, we would rather shut our eyes and be blind than see things as they really are. Grant us the courage to face the reality of our world, and give us the strength to bring your light to those who walk in darkness. Help us see others as you see them, and forgive us when we do not trust you enough to open our eyes to the possibilities before us. Heal our self-inflicted blindness, O God, and lead us in the footsteps of the Light of the World, who reveals your glory in his life, his teachings, and his love. In his holy name, we pray. Amen.

[Ministry Matters™ | Worship Elements: March 19, 2023](#)

Assurance of Forgiveness

May almighty God,
who caused light to shine out of darkness,
shine in our hearts, cleansing us from all our sins,
and restoring us to the light of the knowledge of God's glory,
in the face of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

—based on 2 Corinthians 4:6, NIV

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Scripture Reading John 9:1-41

¹⁻² Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?”

³⁻⁵ Jesus said, “You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world’s Light.”

⁶⁻⁷ He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man’s eyes, and said, “Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam” (Siloam means “Sent”). The man went and washed—and saw.

⁸ Soon the town was buzzing. His relatives and those who year after year had seen him as a blind man begging were saying, “Why, isn’t this the man we knew, who sat here and begged?”

⁹ Others said, “It’s him all right!”

But others objected, “It’s not the same man at all. It just looks like him.”

He said, “It’s me, the very one.”

¹⁰ They said, “How did your eyes get opened?”

¹¹ “A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, ‘Go to

- Siloam and wash.' I did what he said. When I washed, I saw."
- ¹² "So where is he?"
- "I don't know."
- ¹³⁻¹⁵ They marched the man to the Pharisees. This day when Jesus made the paste and healed his blindness was the Sabbath. The Pharisees grilled him again on how he had come to see. He said, "He put a clay paste on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see."
- ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "Obviously, this man can't be from God. He doesn't keep the Sabbath."
- Others countered, "How can a bad man do miraculous, God-revealing things like this?" There was a split in their ranks.
- ¹⁷ They came back at the blind man, "You're the expert. He opened *your* eyes. What do you say about him?"
- He said, "He is a prophet."
- ¹⁸⁻¹⁹ The Jews didn't believe it, didn't believe the man was blind to begin with. So they called the parents of the man now bright-eyed with sight. They asked them, "Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? So how is it that he now sees?"
- ²⁰⁻²³ His parents said, "We know he is our son, and we know he was born blind. But we don't know how he came to see—haven't a clue about who opened his eyes. Why don't you ask him? He's a grown man and can speak for himself." (His parents were talking like this because they were intimidated by the Jewish leaders, who had already decided that anyone who took a stand that this was the Messiah would be kicked out of the meeting place. That's why his parents said, "Ask him. He's a grown man.")
- ²⁴ They called the man back a second time—the man who had been blind—and told him, "Give credit to God. We know this man is an impostor."
- ²⁵ He replied, "I know nothing about that one way or the other. But I know one thing for sure: I was blind . . . I now see."
- ²⁶ They said, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"
- ²⁷ "I've told you over and over and you haven't listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you so eager to become his disciples?"
- ²⁸⁻²⁹ With that they jumped all over him. "*You* might be a disciple of that man, but we're disciples of Moses. We know for sure that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man even comes from."
- ³⁰⁻³³ The man replied, "This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes! It's well known that God isn't at the beck and call of sinners, but listens carefully to anyone who lives in reverence and does his will. That someone opened the eyes of a man born blind has never been heard of—ever. If this man didn't come from God, he wouldn't be able to do anything."
- ³⁴ They said, "You're nothing but dirt! How dare you take that tone with us!" Then they threw him out in the street.
- ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him. He asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

- ³⁶ The man said, “Point him out to me, sir, so that I can believe in him.”
- ³⁷ Jesus said, “You’re looking right at him. Don’t you recognize my voice?”
- ³⁸ “Master, I believe,” the man said, and worshiped him.
- ³⁹ Jesus then said, “I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind.”
- ⁴⁰ Some Pharisees overheard him and said, “Does that mean you’re calling us blind?”
- ⁴¹ Jesus said, “If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you’re accountable for every fault and failure.”

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message In the presence

I am going to start with a disclaimer. As long as that reading was, you have only heard part of the story of the man blind that Jesus healed. Somewhere, sometime, people decided that to help organize how to find things in the Bible they should give the readings chapter numbers, headings, and count the sentences and call them verses. That is helpful, but sometimes it also makes things more complicated. When reading a story, we like knowing we have beginning, middle and an end. I am sure that a number of my teachers from kindergarten on taught me that is how stories work. Yet today you have only heard the beginning and the start of the middle.

If you pay close enough attention to the reading you will see that the story starts with Jesus walking down the street and sees a man blind from birth. He gets into a conversation with the disciples who we are told ask him the wrong question as they ask about sin, which Jesus says has nothing to do with the man’s condition, rather this is an opportunity to “Look instead for what God can do.” (v3)

Things get pretty gross after that, as Jesus takes dirt, spits into it, makes a paste and wipes it on the man’s eyes. Then he tells him to go wash in a particular body of water. Now remember, up until this point, the man has not seen Jesus, he was blind, so he has only heard Jesus’ voice.

The man heads off to the Pool at Siloam. He washed and saw anything and everything for the first time. Now realize that Jesus is no longer in the picture for the next part of the story. This part is all about the community’s reaction to the healing. As you can read, people are not impressed, especially those who believe they have most comprehensive and researched knowledge of how God works in the world. They don’t want that threatened. They just react rather than being curious about what is going on. Sure, they ask questions, but the questions are accusatory, not inquisitive.

The parents don’t defend their child either. They were too worried about repercussions and their standing with those who have power and authority. After much cross examination the man, who knew he was under threat gave them an answer they didn’t

want to hear. He witnessed to Jesus. He stood firm in his experience. Nothing could waver him from the fact that this man Jesus was the reason he could see. He openly wonders why they cannot “see” that for themselves. The religious authorities said, “You’re nothing but dirt! How dare you take that tone with us! Then they threw him out in the street.” (v34)

Remember as all of this has happened, Jesus was not there to witness it. When Jesus heard that they had thrown the healed man out, Jesus went and found him.” Also remember, the man has never seen Jesus, he has only heard him speak. When Jesus asks him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (v35) the man’s response is “Point him out to me, sir, so that I can believe in him.” (v36). And the next words from Jesus are where we need to land, “Jesus said, ‘You’re looking right at him. Don’t you recognize my voice?’” (v37)

Seeing and hearing together. First the man heard Jesus’ voice then he sees Jesus, which is why when we only read chapter nine of the Gospel of John, we miss that fact that Jesus did not stop his teaching at verse 41 of chapter 9. Jesus continues into what we call chapter 10 and we get the words that are familiar to so many of us, the words about Jesus the Good Shepherd and the gate keeper. And that the sheep knows Jesus’ voice. The people of God hear Jesus’ voice.

So as much as many a sermon has made this story of the man born blind a miracle story and all about sight, that only takes part of the story into account. The middle and the end are about Jesus the shepherd and there is as much emphasis put on hearing Jesus as seeing Jesus.

So as is usually my pondering, what has all this got to do with us today? Why is this story in its fullness something to pay attention to? Well, because it speaks to relationship and in particular our relationship with Jesus as well as others.

Think of people whose voices you know well, so well in fact that you do not need to see the person to know it is them just by their voice. I have that with my children and with Ken. Because they are such an intimate part of my life, I can tell it is them with the first hello. I smile as I say that, since with technology it is pretty easy to know who is calling as call display pretty much always gives us a heads up. Still there are those whose numbers are hidden from us, but we can still pin point exactly who we are speaking with because their voice is so familiar to us.

I have a girlfriend from college. We spent two years of our lives together. She was a bridesmaid at my wedding. We speak maybe twice a year and have only seen each other a handful of times in the last 40 years, but when I hear her voice, I know without a doubt that it is my long-time and wonderful friend.

After thinking about this, I had tears as I pondered what it would mean to hear my mom’s voice again. A voice I have not heard in nearly seven years. If I heard her, I would know without a doubt it was my mom, it would send me in the direction of her voice. And to

actually see her...well my heart and mind would be overwhelmed by the amount of joy and love flowing from it.

Now you may not have had that kind of relationship with you mom, but think of someone that has so much meaning in your life that to see and hear them makes your heart glad. I am grateful to have many such relationships with family, friends, and people in this and other churches. My heart is gladdened and lifted up, my spirit filled with joy and love. Many of those relationships also hold so much more promise for deepening and memories, of time together and life experiences together.

This is the promise that we have in Jesus. This is the kind of relationship Jesus, and through Jesus, God wants to have with us. It is a relationship that is so close that we know Jesus' voice when we hear it, even though we cannot see him. It is about knowing Jesus present to us through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. So close to our hearts and minds that we know that somehow, some way Jesus is present with us.

We can't see Jesus, but we can see the face of Jesus is those we love and those we encounter. This hearing and seeing is about being in relationship with God, a God who loves us so much that the Son, Jesus, came to know life with us, died because that love ran so deep and wide and high and long that he chose to go to the extreme to take away anything that gets in the way of our relationship with God. That through the forgiveness of sin we could hear God's voice calling to us, teaching us, leading us, present with us.

We see God in the people and creation around us. All this is important and life-giving. Yet we are called to more. Think back on the relationships that were brought to mind when I asked you to consider someone whose voice or presence would bring you joy. If I asked you to share with me stories of that person, your experiences together, it is likely that the stories would pour out from you.

That is what we are moving toward in our relationship with Jesus, with God. A relationship that is so important, so life-giving, so filled with joy and promise that we can't help but share those stories with others. Not just because they are stories, but because we want to have others know that joy and promise for themselves.

Now I am not saying go out and preach to people, but don't be afraid either. Like the man blind from birth, share how now you see that there is a relationship to be had, that Jesus does make a difference. Maybe you do it through words, maybe through actions, maybe and most often both as part of your regular life, so normal to you that it is like your breath.

With the man from the scripture, whose story has been told over and over again from one generation to the next, may we respond to Jesus words, of seeing and hearing with "I believe."

You and I stand in the presence of Jesus. We do that as individuals and as a community of faith together. Let us share that love, grace, forgiveness, hope, joy, and life with all.

Prayers of the People

God of light and life, we know that darkness is not a thing of the past. Many people in this world of ours feel their world is one of darkness and gloom. Pressures crowd in upon us and get us down.

The causes are varied: bereavement, illness, money, worries about family, trouble at work or not having work, drugs, drink, boredom, doubt, weariness, futility.

Then there are the world issues: war, poverty, climate change, disease, unfair trade and so on. It does not help when we feel that as Christians, we should be doing so much better than we are. Gracious and loving God, we rejoice that you are with us in our troubles, you know us and you love us – always.

Even though we have made a mess of things personally and collectively you remain faithful. We rejoice that your Son came not to a perfect world, but to a broken world, our world. To bring light to the darkness, our darkness.

We pray for our dark and dreary world, a world in need – in need not just of a technical fix, but in need of love and grace, forgiveness and new life, hope, peace and fellowship, in need of renewal, in need of YOU.

We pray that you would come alongside us and all those for whom we pray, that you would show us Jesus, the light of the world, the one who came (and who comes) to rid us of sin, to give us life and health and peace, peace that passes all understanding – not a temporary respite from trouble but the strength to overcome it and ultimately to receive life eternal.

You don't wave a magic wand for everything to be sorted instantly – you require us to exercise our faith and to respond to your call to preach the gospel and to seek to live it out, to look to you for the strength that we need to share your love and grace. Help us to share the good news in word and action – the same good news that the fishermen were called to proclaim that there is a Saviour, a merciful king who loves us and whom we can love and adore.

We have been set free. Enable us to use our freedom to share in bringing in the kingdom. In the light of this we have something to celebrate, something to shout about – for even in our trouble and pain, even in our loss, we know that Jesus is with us.

Hear us as in a moment of silence we pray for those in darkness (of whatever kind) – let us pray that they may see and know the light of Christ:

Silence

The Lord is my light and my salvation. Hear our prayers, Lord, spoken and unspoken and answer them for Jesus' sake, who taught us to pray...

~ written by Rev. Ian McLean, and posted on the Church of Scotland's Starters for Sunday website.
http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/18473/12_January_2014.pdf

Lord's Prayer

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 offering

God has shown us the meaning of generosity
in the beautiful diversity of creation,
in the overflowing love of Jesus Christ,
in the never-ending gift of the Holy Spirit.

God has abundantly blessed us and called us
to be a community that honors each other,
to serve others with joy,
to share our love and material possessions.

Let us rejoice in what we have been given and in what is ours to give.

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Hymn

Turn your eyes upon Jesus

1. O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free.

Refrain

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

2. Through death into life everlasting
He passed, and we follow Him there;
Over us sin no more hath dominion
For more than conqu'rors we are!

Refrain

3. His Word shall not fail you, He promised;
Believe Him and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!

Refrain

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Benediction

Arise! Shine!

for the light of Christ is upon you.

Eph. 5:14

Go into the world bearing the fruit of Christ's light

Eph. 5:9

so that all might see what is good and right and true;

and live as children of the light to the glory of God.

Eph. 5:8b

May the love of God pursue you,

the light of Christ enfold you,

and the Holy Spirit keep you;

this day and always.

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