

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Now David was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome.” Don’t worry. I’m not preaching on that. I just think it needed to be said again.

I can’t remember if it was Amelie or Dorothy who remarked a while back that she was amazed at how our scripture lessons line up with the world around us. In the Episcopal Church, we follow the Revised Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of scripture readings. We don’t pick the lessons. It would seem that the Holy Spirit has been working overtime to match the lessons to the world around us. And our scriptures that we hear in church can provide us a path to meet the needs, hopes, and concerns of this world head on.

“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” This question begins our gospel lesson today. It was a common belief among 1st century Jews that blemishes or imperfections were associated with sin. And, if sin caused illness and imperfections, then someone had to have sinned. So, for the man born blind, who sinned?

To our ears, this question may sound harsh. It is loaded with blame and accusation. It is also a question that is trying to make sense of something that defies logic.

And, yet, it’s the same question that I have been asking for the past 10 days or so. In the midst of a world-wide pandemic, who can I blame for all of this? Who can I point my finger at and yell, “J’accuse” with a sense of absolution of myself? Who is the one responsible so that he or she can bear the brunt of my anger?

Or perhaps, these questions are an attempt to exert some sense of control onto a situation that is out of my control. If I can somehow control a situation, or at least convince myself that I can control a situation, then I have a sense of power. I have a sense of authority. I have a sense of being God.

What questions have you been asking lately? I know I have been asking a lot. What does this virus mean to me? When can I see my friends again? Will we have Easter service? Will my family be okay? Will my parents survive this?

My guess is that you have asked these and other questions, in different words and in different ways. And if you haven’t said them out loud, you have probably thought them.

This week, I have been re-reading Jesus’s response to the disciples’ question: “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.” Jesus’s response to the disciples’ question seems to be an answer for all of our questions as well.

As I sat with this lesson, I realized something for the first time. I had always read this passage as “God made this man blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” And, yet, it does not say that. It says, “he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.”

In the same light, I believe that God did not send the corona virus to punish sinners. This is not some response to the sins of the world. But, I am beginning to see glimpses of how the love of God is working through this pandemic.

Jesus said, “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.” It is day, and God is calling us to do God’s work in this world. We are being called to be the church in new and different ways. We are being called to show the light of Christ, the love of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit to a world that is crying out for hope, for love, and for stability.

You may have seen videos of people in Italy in quarantine singing to one another. If you have not, please google it. I’m not ashamed that those videos bring me to tears. Those voices, singing against the darkness, against despair, and against loneliness, ring out before the very throne of God. And, it is time we add our voices and our hands.

“We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.” Now, more than ever, the Church needs to be the Church. With all due respect to this lovely place, this church is not this building. St. John’s is not just this historic space. We are the living, breathing, moving body of Christ, and we need to lean into and live into our baptismal vows now more than ever. We must move past our own fears and our own needs to begin to respond to the world around us.

And how are we responding? Well, live streaming service is one way. The virtual coffee hour which follows this service is another. We are still gathered and gathering in community, but remotely and virtually. We are still here, singing and praying, hoping and working.

This past week, St. John’s responded to the world. We donated gift cards for the Market on 25th Street to Peter Paul Development Center so that it can support its families. We collected 167 lbs of food for the Christ Ascension’s Food Pantry, and we donated diapers and wipes to the Richmond Public School system to help those in need. And we will continue to find ways to respond to our neighbors and to our world.

How can we as individuals respond? First, don’t panic. Buy what you need and leave the rest for others. Live simply during this time so that others may simply live. Call and check in on

each other. Consider supporting any local businesses that are still open. Find ways to work the works of him who sent us while it is still day. Be the face of God for others, a face that they may not otherwise see.

And pray, my friends. Pray for each other. Pray for Amelie and our vestry. Pray for the leadership of our nation, our commonwealth, our diocese, and our city. Pray for those who are most vulnerable. Pray for those without access to health care, without adequate food, and without adequate shelter.

This congregation will continue to find ways to be nimble, to be flexible, and to be stretched during these times. We will find ways to work the works of God while it is day. We are called to be a beacon on the hill. We will let our light shine so that others may see God.

These are dark days. And, even in these dark days, we still have work to do. “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.”

May God grant us wisdom and grant us courage for the living of these days. Amen.