

Sermon – John 9:1-41  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
4 Lent – Year A  
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### “Light It Up”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. The streetlights weren't working properly that night as he walked home late from work. As he took the shortcut through the alleyway toward his own street, it was almost pitch dark. He knew the path well enough and wasn't worried about it. But a moment later he paused. He'd heard a small noise in the darkness just ahead of him. He waited and listened; but, hearing no more, he guessed he'd been mistaken and started to walk on. At once he heard the noise again. Again he stopped, and felt a small shiver of fear. What was it? Who was it? He decided to put on a brave face. “Who's that?” he asked, hoping his voice didn't sound either too fearful or too threatening. “Is that you, Peter?” asked the voice of a neighbor in return. “Thank goodness! I couldn't see who it was and I was scared stiff!” Their eyes grew used to the dark and they laughed together. They had both been afraid of each other, quite needlessly. The Anglican scholar N.T. Wright tells this story as part of a Bible study on John 9, reminding us that the main problems here are darkness and fear, both of which persist as long as we remain blind to the light of Christ and with eyes shut toward one another in the darkness.
2. Our story in Jerusalem, which centers on Jesus and a man who was born blind, begins with a number of blind men. Jesus' disciples, to be specific. Jesus sees a man, but the men travelling with Jesus do not. They, trapped in this world's deep night, don't see a person. They see a disability, which they fear,

and a theological problem, which they cannot understand. They wonder who sinned to cause such a fate to fall upon this man, for surely such a situation is someone's fault. Jesus, however, sees the man for who he is, someone created by God for the sake of having God's glory revealed through his life. Jesus sees the man and, seeing him, loves him. In a delightfully odd way, Jesus heals him. He spits into the dry earth, makes mud with his divine saliva, and smears it on the man's eyes without bothering to ask the man if he was interested in a mud mask. He sends him to wash. The man goes, washes, and returns able to see. Which is to say, he is able to do something that hardly anyone else in the story can do.

3. As soon this man can see, it becomes clear that most others cannot. His neighbors disbelieve their own eyes, because in spite of clear evidence, the change is too miraculous. Many, although not all, of the Pharisees choose to remain in the dark over issues of Sabbath keeping; their preconceived notions of what is good and godly make it impossible for them to see what is plain as day. The man's parents, fearing for their own place in the community, refuse to affirm what is obviously clear. The one who is claimed by Jesus, cleansed by Jesus, is now able to see. But as for those who think they're doing just fine on their own, regardless of the outcome of their spiritual ophthalmological exam, these receive judgment for their willing desire to remain in the dark. These who seem perfectly well and healthy end up judged for their blindness. But as for the one who couldn't see at the start? He grows into a vision of faithfulness, seeing in Christ not only the One who was able to restore his sight, but the Son of Man who is the very Light of the World. When Jesus says I am the light of the world, those around him would have caught the echoes of the burning bush, through whom God proclaimed, "I AM who I AM." They would have seen the reflection of God's presence like that in the pillar of fire by night, God's own presence leading them not only from darkness to light, but from bondage to freedom. They would recall that that the primal creational change was bringing light to the darkness: Let

there be light. And there was! Jesus is claiming in this moment to be the light-giving, life-giving presence of God, the One, the only One, who can bring people out of their self-imposed blindness, out of their darkness, into the light. As Bono of U2 sings in the new lyrics of their old song, “Where the Streets Have No Name”: “I can get through the fire if I go with you. There’s no other way through.” Just as Jesus was the one way from chaos to creation; just as Jesus was the one way from slavery to freedom; so is Jesus now the only way through spiritual blindness to sight, through deep-pressing darkness to light.

4. For the recipient of the miracle, it’s all good. But for the people around him, the change is too much. It threatens their understanding of how God works; it upends their view of others, a view that allows them to *not* see one another, to write off others as other, as less than. But the grace of God that Jesus unveils demands that we open our eyes and see. This is not easy for us. As Flannery O’Connor writes, “All human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and change is painful.” Indeed, so painful that it costs us everything. So Dietrich Bonhoeffer could write, grace “is costly because it costs people their lives; it is grace, because it thereby makes them live.” Graced with new eyes opened by the Light of the World, we can see one another as God sees us: as people, not disabilities. In fact, we may well begin to see what Jesus saw: that the very people society overlooks are the ones through whom the presence and power of God is most clearly revealed.
  
5. Seeing Jesus now, we see how he is present with us in every darkness. There is now nothing left to fear. Even as we journey into the dark vale of death’s shadow, the Light doesn’t leave us. For he himself has descended into our muddy mortality, planting his cross in the midst of this world’s suffering and sin. And though the light goes out for a time on that Friday afternoon, it is not extinguished for long. In his rising, Jesus transforms the valley of the shadow of death into the antechamber of eternal life. Darkness will be cast aside

forever as we are caught up in God's goodness and mercy, as the psalmist sings. So set aside fear. Fear of the dark, fear of each other, fear of death. Open your eyes to the light. Look to Jesus, the great I AM by whose light you now see. Awake, sleepers, and live in the light, for before you even knew to ask, Christ shined on you and brought you to life and light eternal. Awake to the joy that we are not strangers to fear in the night, but neighbors in the light, laughing at the grace of it all. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.