

## CALL TO WORSHIP

**Leader:** Come, people of God, out of shadow and into light.

**People:** *We come seeking the mercy and truth of Christ.*

**Leader:** We do not come because we already see clearly.

**People:** *We come because Jesus still opens blind eyes.*

**Leader:** The Lord looks not at outward appearance, but at the heart.

**People:** *Search us, O God, and lead us in your way.*

**Leader:** The Lord is our Shepherd in green pastures and in dark valleys.

**People:** *We will fear no evil, for you are with us.*

**Leader:** Once we were darkness, but now we are light in the Lord.

**People:** *Teach us to live as children of light.*

**Leader:** Come, let us worship the living Christ, who meets us in mercy, awakens us in truth, and leads us in holiness.

**People:** *We come to worship, to listen, and to walk in the Light.*

## OPENING SERVICE PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Light of the world.

We come to you as we are... Some are clear, some are confused, some are weary, some are guarded, some are hungry to see, and some are only now discovering how much we need your light.

Search us with mercy.

Open what has been closed in us.

Wake what has grown dull.

Heal what has remained hidden in darkness.

Where we have judged by appearance, teach us to see more deeply.

Where we have walked through valleys, remind us that you are near.

Where we have resisted your truth, make us tender and teachable again.

By your Holy Spirit, quiet our hurry, steady our hearts, and gather us into your presence.

Let your Word shine among us today, so that we may not only hear the truth, but walk in it.

Form in us a holy people—humble, awake, patient, and full of grace—who reflect your light in this world.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Shepherd and our Light.

Amen.

## 1 Samuel 16:1–13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8–14; John 9:1–41 (NIV)

Friends,

There is a certain kind of darkness that does not feel dramatic at first. It feels ordinary...

You wake in the night in a room that ought to be familiar, but for a moment it is not. The chair in the corner looks like a person. The doorframe feels farther away than it should. Your hand reaches out and finds only cold air. Nothing in the room has changed, but until light comes, you do not know the room truthfully.

And that is the thing about light: it does not create the room. It reveals it.

That is where these readings meet us today. Lent is not only a season for feeling serious. This time before Easter is a season for learning to see. Not just to feel more religious. Not just to try harder. Not just to become more moral on the surface. Lent is a season in which God, in mercy, teaches us to see what is true about God, about ourselves, about one another, and about the path we are actually walking.

So, here is the central word for today: (Slide “**This Sunday’s movement**”)

**The good news is not that we have everything figured out, or that we see clearly on our own. The good news is that Jesus brings light where we cannot find our way.**

That is the thread running through all four of our scripture readings today.

### **GOD SEES DEEPER THAN WE DO** (SLIDE “GOD SEES DEEPER THAN WE DO”)

**1 Samuel 16:** Samuel is sent to Jesse’s house to anoint the next king. He sees Eliab and thinks, surely this must be the one. He looks right. He carries himself right. He seems kingly.

But God interrupts Samuel’s assumptions. “*People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*” (1 Sam. 16:7, NIV).

Those words are uncomfortable because **we** are very skilled at judging by appearance. We do it in the church. We do it in families. We do it in leadership. We do it in ourselves.

We confuse polish with depth, confidence with calling, and we confuse being impressive with being faithful.

And sometimes we do something even more dangerous: we **mistake** our *first impression* for *spiritual discernment*... But holiness begins where pretense ends.

Holiness is not a cosmetic religion, nor is it managing appearances; it is consenting to let God tell the truth about us, and then trusting that truth-telling grace enough to be changed by it.

That is why this first reading matters. If God only looked at appearance, most of us would be in trouble. But the mercy of God is that he sees deeper than the image, deeper than the performance, deeper than the public face.

**God sees the heart.**

And that is not bad news. That is grace.

Because if God sees the heart, then God can heal deeper than behavior. God can address what no one else can see. God can work beneath the surface.

That leads naturally to Psalm 23.

## THE SHEPHERD LEADS US IN PLACES WHERE WE CANNOT SEE WELL

(SLIDE “THE SHEPHERD IN THE VALLEY”)

Psalm 23 is beloved for good reason, but sometimes we hear it too gently. We hear green pastures, still waters, and a table prepared. All of that is there. But so is the valley. So is danger. So is the presence of enemies.

This psalm is not sentimental. It is sturdy.

*“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me”* (Ps. 23:4).

Notice what David does not say, I will fear no evil because there is no darkness. He does not say, I will fear no evil because I have mapped the valley. He does not say, I will fear no evil because I understand everything happening to me.

He says, “for you are with me” (Ps. 23:4). **That is the difference.**

We often think what we need most is the right answer, but God meets our deeper need with his presence.<sup>1</sup> That is a strong word for Lent, and it is a strong word for John 9. The disciples want an explanation. Jesus gives them a redirection. The man’s suffering will not be turned into a neat theory. Instead, the works of God will be displayed.

Sometimes we want God to explain the valley. Often what God gives first is companionship in the valley.

That is why the Shepherd matters.

The Shepherd is not a distant manager shouting instructions from a hilltop. The Shepherd is present. The Shepherd guides. The Shepherd restores. The Shepherd stays close enough to carry a rod and staff into the dark with us.

(Show Squire Boone Slide)

When I was preparing this message, I was reminded of the frontier story of a cave where Squire Boone found refuge. The Boone family were Pennsylvania Quakers who moved south and then west across the mountains into rich and fertile land. As Friends, they knew something about endurance, contemplation, and the nearness of God. Local tradition says Daniel and Squire Boone discovered the cave together, and that Squire later found refuge there in a moment of danger. Whether every detail can be verified, the lasting point is that Squire remembered that

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul N. Anderson, “A Theology of Presence” (1993), 2

dark place as a place where God had preserved him. Years later, what mattered most was not the chase but the cave—the dark place where he prayed and remembered the mercy of God.

And that is the deeper spiritual move for today. Dark places can become holy places when they become places where we learn again that our refuge is not self-sufficiency but the nearness of God.

Some of you know that kind of cave.

A season of grief.

A diagnosis.

A strained marriage.

A waiting room.

A burden you cannot fix.

A family story you cannot untangle.

A question you cannot answer.

And in that darkness, the Shepherd's promise is not, "You will understand immediately." The promise is, "You are not alone."

That brings us to Ephesians.

### **JESUS COMFORTS AND AWAKENS... (SLIDE: THE DEEPEST BLINDNESS)**

Paul says, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light" (Eph. 5:8, NIV). Then he says, "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you" (Eph. 5:14, NIV).

That is strong language.

Lent is not just about being comforted. It is also about being awakened.

Some of us need the comfort of Psalm 23. Some of us need the wake-up call of Ephesians 5. Most of us need both.

Because it is possible to sit in church and still be half-asleep.

It is possible to know Bible words and still avoid the Light.

It is possible to defend the truth and still resist being searched by it.

It is possible to be religious and yet remain hidden from God in all the places where we most need healing.

Paul says, you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. That means the gospel of God is not merely that we get better advice. The gospel of God is that in Jesus Christ, a new reality has broken in. Christ does not merely improve our old life. He brings us into another life altogether.

Friends have always been strongest when they have remembered that the Light is not a vague inward glow. The Light is Christ himself, present, searching, exposing, cleansing, and leading.

To walk in the light means I stop asking only, “How do I look?” and start asking, “What is Christ showing me?”

What resentment in me needs naming?

What fear in me has been running the room?

What habit in me survives by staying hidden?

What wound in me needs to be brought into the open presence of Jesus?

Holiness is not life under a spotlight of guilt or shame; it is life opened to the healing light of Christ.

And that takes us straight into John 9.

### **THE DEEPEST BLINDNESS IS NOT...** (SLIDE THE DEEPEST BLINDNESS)

John 9 begins with a question that sounds theological, but it is really a blame question.

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2, NIV).

The disciples want a cause they can manage. Somebody must be at fault. Somebody must be blamed. Somebody must carry the weight of explanation.

But Jesus will not let them stay there.

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” Jesus says, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him” (John 9:3, NIV).

Now, that does not mean suffering is easy. It does not mean blindness is good. It means Jesus refuses to reduce this man to a moral equation. He refuses to let pain become a platform for superiority.

Assessing blame rarely does redemptive good; often, what we most need is not an airtight explanation but the presence of God. That is exactly what Jesus gives in this chapter—not a neat theory, but a healing encounter.

Jesus makes mud. He sends the man to wash. The man comes back seeing.

And from there, the whole chapter becomes a conflict over what to do with a truth that does not fit established categories.

The healed man is remarkably simple. He does not pretend to know everything. He just tells the truth he has. Earlier, I was blind. Now, I see.

That is a powerful testimony because it is honest and limited at the same time. He is not trying to win an argument. He is bearing witness to grace.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, are the tragic figures in the chapter. They are intelligent, trained, devout, serious, and blind. Not physically blind, but spiritually blind. And their blindness becomes worse because they defend it.

They already know what must be true. Therefore, they cannot receive the thing God is doing right in front of them.

And that is the warning of John 9.

The great danger is not simply being in darkness. The great danger is calling darkness light and light darkness. It is being so certain of our own vision that we can no longer be corrected by Christ.

In this passage, the Pharisees do not wait for light. They rush to verdict. They do not listen. They defend. They do not receive. They manage.

And so the man born blind ends up seeing more clearly than the religious experts.

That is the reversal.

The man who knows he needs mercy receives mercy.

The people who think they do not need light remain in darkness.

And that is still how it works.

## **A SECOND PICTURE: DRIVING THROUGH FOG**

Let me give you one more picture.

If you have ever driven through thick fog at night, you know that speed is not your friend. High beams are not always your friend, either. Sometimes the brighter, harsher light only bounces back at you, making it harder to see. In fog, wisdom often looks like slowing down, lowering your beams, paying attention, and staying close to the lines you can actually see.

That is a spiritual picture.

There are seasons when you do not need more speed.

You need more patience.

You need more listening.

You need less panic and more presence.

Sometimes the reason we do not see clearly is not that God is absent. It is because we are hurrying through fog.

And that is why the practices of silence, listening, and patient attention matter. They do not earn grace. They make room for us to notice grace.

They help us stop talking long enough to hear.

They help us stop reacting long enough to discern.

They help us stop pretending long enough to be met by Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

So let me gather the whole sermon into one place.

In 1 Samuel, God sees beyond appearances.  
In Psalm 23, God stays with us in the valley.  
In Ephesians, Christ wakes us and calls us into light.  
In John 9, Jesus opens blind eyes and exposes false sight.

And taken together, the message is this:

**Jesus does not merely help us cope in the dark. Jesus gives us the grace to see.**

Friends, some of us need that grace because we are weary.  
Some need it because we are confused.  
Some need it because we are carrying hidden things.  
Some need it because we have been judging too quickly.  
Some need it because we have mistaken religious certainty for spiritual sight.

But the good news is this: Christ still opens blind eyes.

So bring him your darkness.  
Bring him your questions.  
Bring him your defended places.  
Bring him your fatigue.  
Bring him the places where you do not see yourself truthfully.  
Bring him the places where you do not see other people mercifully.

And ask, simply and honestly:

Lord Jesus Christ, let me see.

Because the holy life is not the life of people who never needed light.  
The holy life is the life of people who keep turning toward it.

Amen.