

The 4th Sunday in Lent
The Reverend Charles R. Cowherd
March 22, 2020

Of all the lessons, in all the weekends, in all the times, on this 4th Sunday of Lent, in the middle of this unprecedented moment in our history, we get a long lesson about many things..... but the thing that caught my eye is the.....Spit!

How could it not? Words like “Social distancing”, “respiratory droplets”, “virus gestation period” dominate our life. And then we get a story where Jesus spits on the ground and rubs the mixture in someone’s eyes!

Because this moment in John’s Gospel is indeed so visceral and so primal, scholars contend that it was most likely a historical act of Jesus. In his time, this type of act would have led Jesus to come under scrutiny as just another magician or shaman of the day. That the Gospel writer included the sequence attests to its occurrence.¹

Here is an image of the scene from a 17th century artist:²



¹ Brown, Raymond E. 1966. *The Gospel according to John (I-XII)*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 372.

² Nicolas Colombel, 1682. *Christ healing the blind*, (Public Domain)

It depicts a Jesus that we are familiar with, surrounded by people, interacting with all of humankind.

That's the other hallmark of our faith, and indeed our tradition as Anglicans, this embodied, Incarnational sense of our religious practice. That is, we are used to meeting as a community, sharing the bread and wine, exchanging the peace, bumping into one another and living our faith lives with mind, soul, *and* body.

In this moment of need, that is what we need from Jesus and, desperately, from one another but that ability is curtailed by our understanding of what that activity would do to us.

John 9.1-41 is a long lesson and a masterpiece of narrative plot, that does not lend itself to pithy phrases or simple explanations.

Instead it would be better served to be acted out, almost as a play. OR it would be better served to be read and studied again and again for its gifts.

On the 2nd reading (or maybe 3rd or 4th), did you notice that Jesus' spit/mud poultice do not actually heal the man blind from birth?

Rather, Jesus performs that action and then orders the blind man to "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, which means Sent." Only THEN, are the blind man's eyes and opened.

One may asked: was the first action necessary and why? Did Jesus really need to hock a loogie and rub it into your eye sockets, only to tell him to go wash in a pool?

The second action reveals its importance in its place name. Jesus sends him to the pool of "Siloam", which means simply "Sent."

Scripture, of course, rarely resists giving something a name that is not fraught with great meaning.

I believe that Jesus is saying: in the first action, you are a part of the created order, made from dust, (Genesis 2.7). In the second action, he directs the blind man, and us, to the Living Water of the One who is Sent. Jesus is setting up this idea that he

is beyond the miracle-workers, the tricksters, and Magi of that time. He is saying I am the Living Water, the Bread, the Life, and I offer a way of life that will sustain you long after I am gone.

We have trouble seeing that Living Water now. We have trouble seeing anything but fear, anxiety, loneliness,

But we can see it in the faces of a neighbor waving “hello” from across the street. We can see it in the daily Meditations that Good Shepherd is offering every morning, Monday through Saturday.

We can see it in the beauty of creation, opening up before our eyes in this beautiful season of Spring.

We can see it through the wonders of technology, in our Zoom meetings and Facetime class.

We will see it a week from today in our GS Worship Livestream.

During this time, we will see unexpected things, surprising things, as if our eyes are opened for the very first time.

AMEN.