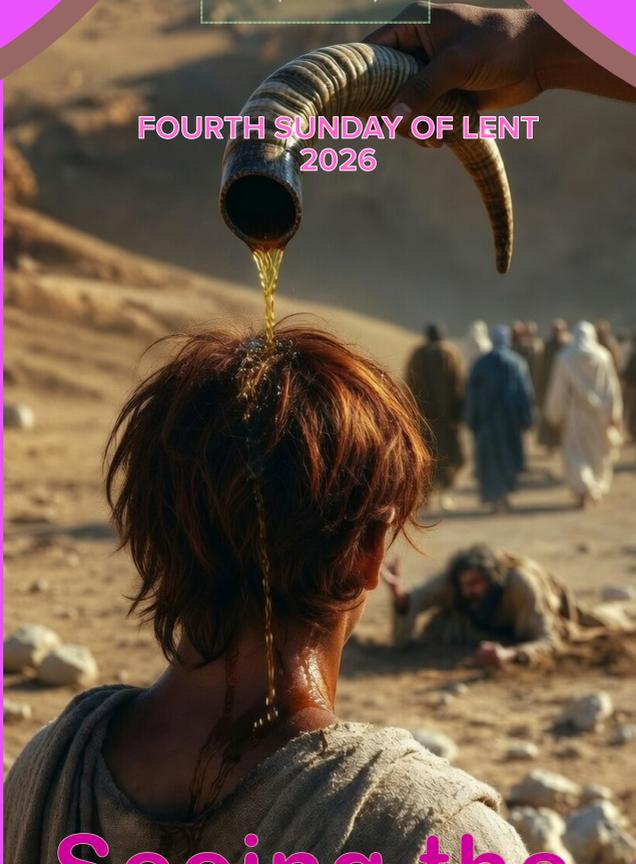




BREAKING OPEN

Scripture Study

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT
2026



Seeing the Shepherd

Dennis Webster

A weekly reflection based on the teachings at St Peter's by the Lake, Paynesville, together with a study guide based on the readings, some liturgical resources RCL Lectionary, and a weekly devotion

Revised Common Lectionary Related

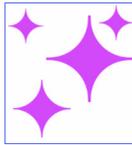
The Fourth Sunday of Lent

1 Samuel 16.1-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5.8-14

John 9.1-41



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

Grant,
we beseech thee,
Almighty God,
that we,
who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve
to be punished,
by the comfort of thy grace
may mercifully be relieved:
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to truly see as God sees? In a powerful exploration of sight, belonging, and divine perspective, Pastor weaves together the stories of David's unexpected anointing and Jesus healing of the blind man to reveal how God's vision transcends our limited human judgment. Through vivid illustrations of Samuel's journey to find a king and Jesus's intimate act of making mud with his own saliva, we witness how the Divine Shepherd consistently chooses the overlooked and transforms lives through simple acts of grace.

The link between ancient stories and today's struggles with blame, rejection, and the desire to belong emphasises a key message from Jesus regarding the blind man: "This happened so that the works of God might be displayed." This encourages us to shift our focus from blaming others to building our faith. In our own moments of confusion and darkness, we are reminded to trust in the Shepherd's vision and recognise ourselves as God's children. We should avoid quick judgments and blame, allowing the Shepherd to show us new paths to healing and belonging within His family.

Exploring how ancient stories resonate with contemporary issues such as blame rejection and the yearning for acceptance, the text draws on a biblical story about a blind man to impart a valuable lesson from Jesus. The statement, "This happened so that the works of God might be displayed," implies that challenges can have a greater purpose, urging people to build their faith rather than point fingers.

The term "the Shepherd" signifies guidance and protection, urging us to trust in divine wisdom during challenging times. It invites us to reconsider our judgments of others and to practice patience, fostering healing and a sense of belonging within a spiritual community. Recognising that we are all "God's children" inspires us to cultivate connections and demonstrate compassion, rather than resorting to blame.

An additional note (not covered in the Sermon) regarding Samuel, and the unusual welcome he receives coming into Bethlehem. Without explanation to the listeners, the portion to be read picks up a considerable deal of mistrust and fear about Samuel's arrival. Both the Hebrew scriptures and the Gospel hedge around an issue that is crucial to understand the nature of sin, herem (also rendered rehem), and the concept of fulfilling the law. Total destruction is a theme that is hard to balance in the Hebrew Scriptures. Joshua insists that Jericho is totally and utterly destroyed. The flood story is another time of annihilation. Saul's lack of killing King Agag, and keeping his livestock as 'spoils' of war contravened the principle of no spoils of war. As a result, Samuel personally tore apart the king, and denouncing Saul as ruler of Israel. (see 1 Samuel 15). No wonder they were concerned. Countering all of that is the overriding Shepherd image that seeks to include, not destroy. Paul sees that as 'fulfilment' of the law. It is an difficult tension!

As we walk lightly on sacred ground,
teach us Lord to make known your kingdom,
and let this reflect in all that we do and say.

Seeing the Shepherd

Well may we say, God save the King, because nothing is going to save Agag." Having been told by God to lay waste or annihilate the Amalekites and take no plunder, he spares the King and takes the best of everything for himself. Through Samuel, God's displeasure is made known. Samuel personally takes charge and dispatches Agag, king of the Amalekites, and liberates the spoils from Saul's keeping. No wonder when Samuel arrived at Bethlehem, there was some level of consternation

Samuel comes to Bethlehem, searching for a new king. He sees Eliab, tall and strong, and thinks, This must be him. "He's a fine looking rooster!"

But the Lord interrupts: "Don't look at appearance or height; mortals see the outward, but the Lord sees the heart."

Jesse's sons pass by, but none are chosen. Samuel asks, "Are these all your sons?"

Then David appears, the youngest, forgotten in the fields. Dust clings to his skin. The shepherd boy stands before Samuel. Cool oil runs over his head, unexpected. The Spirit settles. In that moment, he is chosen.

The one left out is chosen.

David stumbles in, sheep scent and exhaustion on him. His brothers stand tall, puzzled. David remains unnoticed. Then warm oil flows over his head, sacred and surprising. In the silence, God sees him as no one else has.

This pattern repeats in the Gospel story. The disciples encounter a man who has been blind since birth. They ask, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents?"

Blame comes easily when pain arises. I look for reasons, replay words, search for mistakes—sometimes in others, often in myself. This habit runs deep, shaping my thoughts and feelings before I notice.

However, Jesus rejects this framework. He says, "This man did not sin, nor did his parents."

Instead, he points to something different: "So that the works of God might be revealed."

Jesus turns us from blame to hope. He invites us to wonder what God might do here, not to dwell on what caused the pain. In this shift, restoration becomes possible.

It's not "Whose fault is this?" but "What might God do here?"
Then something strange happens.

Jesus kneels down, spits on the ground, makes mud, and gently places it on the man's eyes.

This strange gesture, almost an anointing, reveals grace meeting us in earth and flesh. Dust and spit recall the waters of baptism. Soil pressed on blind eyes—here, the incarnation draws near. Heaven and earth meet in a simple touch.

Perhaps that's exactly what it is.

In the ancient world, oil placed on the head marked someone for healing, welcome, or vocation. Here, Jesus uses earth itself.

The Creator who shaped us from dust now uses the earth to give sight. Creation happens again.

Then Jesus says to the man, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam."
John explains that Siloam means "Sent," sent to water, sent to healing.

The man unable to see is sent to the pool named Sent, by the One sent from the Father.

He goes, washes, and comes back seeing.

Light pours in, flooding his world with colour and clarity. Shadows vanish. Shapes burst with life. Every edge, every face, is startlingly beautiful. Wonder and awe nearly bring him to his knees. Tears well up before he can speak.

However, a different kind of blindness begins to manifest. The neighbours are confused.

The Pharisees question the miracle, troubled by its timing on the Sabbath. Mercy is hidden behind the law.

The man who wandered in darkness now stands in harsh light. Questions sting. Rejection burns. He is driven out, cut off from his people, just as joy was beginning to dawn.

Even in exile, hope flickers. Jesus hears and comes searching. Lonely, the man looks up and finds gentle eyes. The world closed its door. Jesus opens it with quiet compassion.

The Shepherd seeks the one who has been pushed away.

Here, the next words of Jesus in the passage that follows today's reading make sense: "I am the Good Shepherd." The Shepherd who seeks the lost, restores sight and gathers the flock.

The Shepherd's promise unfolds in Psalm 23. God prepares a table for the overlooked, anointing David's head while his brothers watch, caught between wonder and confusion.

God guides the once-blind man through valleys of confusion and rejection, into a burst of welcoming light. Rod and staff become comfort—warmth against the cold, steadiness against fear. This Psalm is lived, not just for ancient heroes, but for the uncertain, the rejected, the called.

"The Lord is my shepherd."
"He leads me beside still waters."
"He restores my soul."

Having faced exclusion, suspicion, and rejection, the man born blind has yet to encounter water.

He washes and sees. Ultimately, he utters the most profound words in the story: "Lord, I believe."

Paul further explores this transformation in Ephesians. He writes, "Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord, you are light. Live as children of light." He calls us children, not strangers or outsiders. The word carries something deeper.

Children inherit the house. In Christ, we are not just forgiven. We are welcomed home and made heirs. Just as David, the overlooked shepherd boy, became heir to the kingdom upon his anointing.

God looks for inward change, not outward show or blame. Even now, we are called to trust God's vision, let go of blame, and receive the invitation to belong.

Many still wrestle with the disciples' question: "Who sinned?" They carry quiet burdens of guilt and shame, wondering if hardship means God is disappointed. However, the Gospel doesn't begin with accusation; it starts with restoration.

The Shepherd never stays far. He does not point fingers or demand reasons for darkness. He draws near, into tangled pain and shame, and gently opens our eyes. In a difficult situation, we often blame others.

But the Gospel invites three new questions:

- Is the Shepherd working here?
- What small step of trust is Jesus asking of me?
- What new sight might God be giving me through this experience?

Because faith often develops just as sight did for that man: gradually, step by step. Curiosity. Then recognition. Then understanding. And finally, faith.

The invitation may be simple and urgent. Those who have seen light in darkness are sent by the Shepherd to offer hope, healing, and belonging. Like the man at the Pool of Siloam, we proceed with open eyes and hearts, embodying God's message of welcome and renewal. The main point is this: God restores, includes, and calls us back home.

- Let us seek the Shepherd's guidance, especially during times of doubt or need.
- Let us trust that the One sent by the Father pours life into our dry places, even when we cannot see it yet.
- Let us turn from blame, failure, and darkness.
- Let us believe that belonging is the final word over our lives.
-

Belonging is the final word.

The Shepherd who restores sight also brings us home. He invites us to live as children and heirs every day.

Home as children and heirs.
Home as heirs, welcomed into belonging.

Within the Father's household, we're empowered to welcome others home too. There is no spoils or plunder in the face of evil. There is only reconciliation and peace.

As the psalm states, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Discussion Questions

In the sermon, we see God choosing David, the overlooked shepherd boy, over his more impressive-looking brothers. How does this challenge our tendency to judge others based on outward appearances?

- Samuel initially thought Eliab must be God's chosen king because of his height and appearance, but God reminded him that 'mortals see the outward, but the Lord sees the heart.'
- When have you felt overlooked or judged by outward appearances, and how did that experience shape your understanding of God's view of you?

The sermon discusses how Jesus shifts the disciples' focus from blame ('Who sinned?') to hope ('What might God do here?'). Why is this shift in perspective so important for our spiritual growth?

- When the disciples encountered the blind man, they immediately asked about who was at fault, but Jesus redirected their attention to God's potential work in the situation.
- What situation in your life right now needs to be reframed from 'Who is to blame?' to 'What might God do here?'

The blind man's journey to faith is described as gradual: 'Curiosity. Then recognition. Then understanding. And finally, faith.' How does this progression reflect your own faith journey?

- The sermon shows how the blind man's healing led to a gradual development of faith, culminating in his declaration, 'Lord, I believe.'
- Where do you currently see yourself in this progression of faith, and what next step do you feel God calling you to take?

Psalms 23 is referenced as being 'lived, not just for ancient heroes, but for the uncertain, the rejected, the called.' How does this psalm speak to both the blind man's story and our own experiences of being guided by the Shepherd?

- The sermon connects the Good Shepherd's care in Psalm 23 to how Jesus sought out the healed man after he was rejected by his community.
- Which aspect of the Shepherd's care described in Psalm 23 do you most need in your life right now?

The sermon emphasises that 'belonging is the final word' and that we're 'welcomed home as children and heirs.' How does this truth change how we view ourselves and others in the church community?

- The sermon connects Paul's words in Ephesians about being 'children of light' with our identity as heirs in God's household.
- How can you help create a sense of belonging for others who might feel like outsiders in your faith community?

This five-day devotional aims to provide deeper insight into this weekend's sermon. Together, we will explore themes of being chosen, looking beyond the surface, and the transformative power of God's touch. These themes invite us to embrace our identities as treasured children and heirs in His kingdom.



Day 1

1 Samuel 16:7

Today, we explore how God sees beyond our surface and looks into the heart. In the story of David's anointing, Samuel learns that God's criteria for choosing a king differ from human expectations. David, the youngest and seemingly overlooked, is chosen by God for his heart. This choice reminds us of God's ability to see potential where others might see insignificance. God invites us to trust His vision over our lives and to believe in the depths He perceives within us.

Consider how this insight challenges the way you see yourself and others. God's anointing is not limited by physical stature or societal position; it's about the readiness of one's heart to serve. Embrace this truth as you anticipate the ways God may be calling you today.

- How do I perceive myself in the light of God's vision rather than societal standards?
- Have I overlooked someone whom God might be calling for a greater purpose?
- What steps can I take to align my perception with God's vision?
- Pray for the ability to see with God's eyes, recognising the value within yourself and others.
- Ask for guidance to embrace God's calling, even when it defies expectations.

Day 2

John 9:1-3

In the Gospel story, the disciples question Jesus about the cause of a man's blindness, seeking to assign blame. Instead, Jesus shifts the conversation toward the possibilities of God's work being revealed. This narrative invites us to move from a mindset of blame to one of hope. Pain and hardship are no longer seen as punishments but as opportunities for God's grace to manifest, transforming our understanding of suffering and redemption.

As we reflect, consider how this perspective can alter the way you respond to challenges in your life. Embrace the idea that beauty emerges from brokenness, knowing that God's work may reveal itself in unexpected ways. This shift opens the door for healing and new understanding.

- In what areas of my life am I still holding onto blame instead of looking for God's work?
- How can I shift my focus from fault-finding to hope and healing?
- What small step can I take today to embrace Jesus' invitation to live in light?
- Pray for the grace to release blame and to trust in God's transformative power.
- Seek God's guidance in recognising His work in your struggles and challenges.

Day 3

Psalm 23

The assurance of God's guidance and presence as our Shepherd is beautifully illustrated in Psalm 23. David, once a shepherd himself, knew intimately the care he received from God, and so he penned these comforting words. The imagery of being led to still waters and having our souls restored demonstrates God's unwavering commitment to our well-being. As our Shepherd, God not only provides and protects but also invites us into a deep sense of belonging and security.

Let this psalm remind you of the constant care God has for you, that His presence and guidance are always at hand, especially in moments of doubt or fear. Approach life with the assurance that the Shepherd leads you always toward goodness and mercy.

- How does the reassurance of God as my Shepherd impact my daily life?
- Where in my life do I need to allow God to lead me to stillness and restoration?
- How can I cultivate trust in God's guidance, even in uncertain times?
- Invite God to shepherd your heart and mind, bringing peace and reassurance.
- Thank God for His promise of never leaving nor forsaking you.

Day 4

John 9:6-7

Jesus performs a miraculous act by using earth and spittle to heal the blind man,

illustrating the profound nature of God's creative power. This miracle demonstrates the Creator's ability to bring forth new life through simple, earthly materials. It invites us to witness how God can work through the ordinary in extraordinary ways, giving us sight to see His hand in all creation.

Reflect on how God might be asking you to see the ordinary in your life through a new lens. Be open to the healing and restoring powers that God's simple touch can offer, much like the blind man who washed and came back seeing.

- In what ways can I recognise God's presence in the ordinary circumstances of my life?
- What simple elements of my life might God use to bring about healing and transformation?
- How can I remain open to God's surprising acts of grace?
- Pray for open eyes and an open heart to recognise God's providence in your life.
- Ask for clarity and vision to see beyond the surface, trusting in God's larger plan.

Day 5

Ephesians 5:8

"Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord, you are light." This powerful declaration from Paul in Ephesians encourages us to embrace our identity in Christ as children of light. It speaks to the transformative journey we embark on through faith, moving from darkness to brilliance. With this new identity, we are called to reflect God's light and love in the world, thereby inviting others to share in the same glorious inheritance.

Consider how you can actively live as a child of light, fostering a life that shines with God's truth and love. Just as God welcomed us as heirs, we are empowered to extend that invitation of belonging to others, making our world a brighter place through His presence.

- How am I living out my identity as a child of light in my everyday actions?
- What areas of darkness in my life require God's illuminating presence?
- How can I extend the message of belonging and grace to those around me?
- Thank God for the transformation from darkness to light and His constant presence.
- Seek ways to be a beacon of hope and encouragement to those in need of God's light.

End notes and further reading

End notes and further reading

Harrington, Daniel J Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew
Moloney, Francis J, SBD, Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John
Johnson, Luke Timothy: Sacra Pagina: The Gospel on Luke
Collins, Raymond F., Sacra Pagina: First Corinthians
Andrew McGowan substack.com/@abmcg
N.T. Wright, Twelve months of Sundays Year A
Andrew Pratt, pastor and hymn writer (theworshipcloud.com)

Let your faith and relationships
be shaped by love and patience
for God's love is
revealed in lives, not letters.



Brabarlung Totem

This is produced on
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