

Fourth Sunday in Lent Sunday, March 22, 2020

The Collect: Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: 1 Samuel 16:1-13 read from the New Revised Standard Version Bible

16 The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." 2 Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' 3 Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." 4 Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" 5 He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." [a] 7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." 9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." 10 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." 11 Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." 12 He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and

anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

The Word of the Lord

Psalm 23 read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

1 The Lord is my shepherd; *

I shall not be in want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures *

and leads me beside still waters.

3 He revives my soul *

and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.

4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I shall fear no evil; *

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

5 You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; *

you have anointed my head with oil,

and my cup is running over.

6 Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, *

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Epistle: Ephesians 5:8-14 read from the New Revised Standard Version Bible

Anglicized

8 For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—
9 for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,
'Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.'

The Word of the Lord

Gospel: John 9:1-41 read from the World English Bible

1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

3 Jesus answered, "This man didn't sin, nor did his parents, but that the works of God might be revealed in him. 4 I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. The night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground, made mud with the saliva, anointed the blind man's eyes with the mud, 7 and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means "Sent"). So he went away, washed, and came back seeing.

8 Therefore the neighbors and those who saw that he was blind before said, "Isn't this he who sat and begged?" 9 Others were saying, "It is he." Still others were saying, "He looks like him."

He said, "I am he."

10 They therefore were asking him, "How were your eyes opened?"

11 He answered, "A man called Jesus made mud, anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went away and washed, and I received sight."

12 Then they asked him, "Where is he?"

He said, "I don't know."

13 They brought him who had been blind to the Pharisees. 14 It was a Sabbath when Jesus

made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Again therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, I washed, and I see."

16 Some therefore of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because he doesn't keep the Sabbath."

Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" So there was division among them.

17 Therefore they asked the blind man again, "What do you say about him, because he opened your eyes?"

He said, "He is a prophet."

18 The Jews therefore didn't believe concerning him, that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight, 19 and asked them, "Is this your son, whom you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

20 His parents answered them, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but how he now sees, we don't know; or who opened his eyes, we don't know. He is of age. Ask him. He will speak for himself." 22 His parents said these things because they feared the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if any man would confess him as Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age. Ask him."

24 So they called the man who was blind a second time, and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner."

25 He therefore answered, "I don't know if he is a sinner. One thing I do know: that though I was blind, now I see."

26 They said to him again, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

27 He answered them, "I told you already, and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You don't also want to become his disciples, do you?"

28 They insulted him and said, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses. But as for this man, we don't know where he comes from."

30 The man answered them, "How amazing! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, he listens to him. 32 Since the world began it has never been heard of that anyone opened the eyes of someone born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

34 They answered him, "You were altogether born in sins, and do you teach us?" Then they threw him out.

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and finding him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of God?"

36 He answered, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?"

37 Jesus said to him, "You have both seen him, and it is he who speaks with you."

38 He said, "Lord, I believe!" and he worshiped him.

39 Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, that those who don't see may see; and that those who see may become blind."

40 Those of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?"

41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.'

Therefore your sin remains.

The Gospel of the Lord

Closing Prayer: On March 28 we remember James Solomon Russell Priest.

James Solomon Russell was born into slavery on December 20th, 1857, near Palmer Springs, Virginia. He became known as the father of St. Paul's College (one of the three historically Black Episcopal Colleges) and was the founder of numerous congregations, a missionary, and a writer.

He was the first student of St. Stephen's Normal and Theological Institute (which later became the Bishop Payne Divinity School) in Petersburg, Virginia. In 1888, one year after his ordination as a priest in The Episcopal Church, Russell and his wife Virginia opened St. Paul's Normal School in Lawrenceville, Virginia. Russell's vision for the school was to provide both a literary and an industrial education. Religion was a mandatory subject, and students attended chapel twice daily. Russell served as the school's principal and chaplain until his retirement in 1929.

For 52 years of ordained ministry in the Diocese of Southern Virginia, he worked tirelessly to encourage black candidates to enter Holy Orders so that they could care for the growing numbers of black Episcopalians. In 1893, Russell was named the first Archdeacon for Colored Work. Southern Virginia had the largest population of African American Episcopalians in the United States, thanks in large measure to Russell's evangelistic efforts. In 1927, Russell was the first African American elected bishop in The Episcopal Church. However, he declined election as Suffragan Bishop for Colored Work in the Dioceses of Arkansas and North Carolina, and he was glad that his action helped defeat the idea of subordinate racial bishops.

Russell's ministry continued until his death on March 28, 1935. His autobiography, *Adventure in Faith*, was published the following year.

Let us pray: God, font of resurrected life, we bless you for the courageous witness of your deacon, James Solomon Russell, whose mosaic ministry vaulted over adversity; allure us into the wilderness and speak tenderly to us there so that we might love and worship you as he did, sure of our legacy of saving grace through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, always and ever. **Amen.**