

SOUTHWOOD UNITED CHURCH DEVOTIONAL SERIES

LENT 2026 – YEAR A – WEEK 4

Theme – discernment, God’s love, Hope

Sunday, March 15

Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1 The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way;

Thought: Today I am struck with the idea that God not only loves us, but calls us accountable and here, God is certainly calling Samuel accountable! God expects us to get with the program. God rejected Saul, it was not Samuel’s concern anymore and it was time to move on. Pretty blunt direction – get going. Have you ever been so bluntly redirected by God?

Prayer: Loving God – I accept that you will hold me accountable and expect me to follow your plan. Help me to do just that.

Monday, March 16

Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-3 I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.” But Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.” The LORD said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.”

Thought: Continuing on from yesterday’s story – we all have reasons and excuses not to obey God. I almost laughed out loud when I read this part of Samuel’s story because God not only insisted that Samuel get on with the program, God even provided Samuel with a cover story. Somehow, this was not something I expected to find in the character of God, but it makes sense. God insists and wishes us to obey and will provide everything we need to follow. What was your reaction to this story?

Prayer: God – you know my heart and the reasons and excuses and even lies I tell myself to avoid doing what you have called me to do. Help me in whatever way necessary to move beyond my excuses and obey your call.

Tuesday, March 17

Reading: 1 Samuel 16:7 But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Thought: We might be tempted to simply accept the surface meaning of this verse. Oh – I totally agree that it is important to look beyond a person’s physical appearance, but I think there is more to this verse. When God looks into our heart he sees who we really are, and since we are all made in the image of God, our natural heart is who God made us to be. God not only looks beyond a person’s physical appearance, but also beyond our past and the outward things that we might get caught up on. God’s discernment is perfect. We may not be perfect, but if we carry the desire for a pure heart within us, then God will use that to advantage. What are the desires of your heart?

Prayer: All-seeing God – you see me as no one else can. I pray that the deep desires of my heart be aligned with your plan. Use me as you will.

Wednesday, March 18

Reading: John 9:1–3 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Thought: This story of the man blind from birth is often used to illustrate the concept that God uses all things for good and that the glory of God is displayed in miracles. I totally agree that these things are true, but when I read this verse today (after asking God to direct my thoughts as usual) I was immediately called to consider the assumption that the disciples made. The disciples could only see one reason for the man’s blindness – sin. Jesus directed them to consider another possibility. As we go through life seeking to understand and obey God, we are called to step back and consider our assumptions. Sometimes these are buried deep within our memories and experiences. We may need help to look beyond what we think is right and consider other options. Have you ever discovered an assumption you didn’t realize you had?

Prayer: All-powerful God – I believe in your plan, even though I can not understand it in its entirety. Help me to see the possibilities you lay before me and grant me wisdom to discern your word.

Thursday, March 19

Reading: John 9:28-34 Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.” The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

Thought: I have learned that it is almost impossible to change someone’s beliefs. The blind man gave an explanation with impeccable logic, and yet the Pharisees simply could not accept this. I wasn’t there, but I suspect what got in the way of the Pharisees acceptance of the miracle of the blind man was their ego, and don’t we all fall prey to that trap sometimes. I think it is human nature to want to be right, to want to be the best, and this can be a good thing. The problem arises when we let those human wants get in the way of truth. Have you ever acted the way the Pharisees did?

Prayer: Creator God – you have made me in your image and above all I want to be as Jesus. Help me to identify the things I believe in that are counter to your plan. Help me to recognize them and to remove them so I may be in better alignment with you.

Friday, March 20

Reading: Psalm 23:1-3 The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.

Thought: This is the start of one of the most beloved psalms, and what a beautiful picture it paints. God cares for us, provides all we need. We are able to rest in a place of nourishment and satisfaction. God's presence invigorates and revives us. What a blessing! So often we ignore the advice of this psalm. We get busy and fail to listen to God who calls us to be still, to lie down and be refreshed. Take a moment today and sit quietly, imagine the still waters with Jesus beside you. Ask to be blessed and refreshed. Will you do this? What happened?

Prayer: Refreshing God – I recognize the call of the world to rush and be busy and I forget to take time to be with you. Open my ears and my heart to hear your refreshing whispers of love, care, delight, and joy. Please - refresh my body, my heart, my soul, and my mind.

Saturday, March 21

Reading: Ephesians 5:8–9 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth)

Thought: Although Lent is a time of serious contemplation, it is also a time of calling and hope and confirmation. By participating in this devotional series you are living in the light! You are called to live in the light as a true child of God. And- you ARE the light in God and of God. What will you do with that light?

Prayer: Holy God – let your light shine within me and pour out into the world.

Complete Lectionary Readings for the Fourth Sunday in Lent March 15

1 Samuel 16:1–13 **Samuel Anoints David**

16 The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

2 But Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.”

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 to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.”

4 Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, “Do you come in peace?”

5 Samuel replied, “Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.

Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

6 When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.”

7 But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.” **9** Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but

Samuel said, “Nor has the LORD chosen this one.” **10** Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The LORD has not chosen these.” **11** So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.”

Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.”

12 So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”

13 So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah

Psalm 23 **Psalm 23**

A psalm of David.

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

3 he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name’s sake.

4 Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,^[a]

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever

Ephesians 5:8–14 ⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴ This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you

John 9:1–41 **Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind**

⁹ As he went along, 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 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

⁶ After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ⁷ “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

⁸ His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some claimed that he was.

Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”
But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

¹⁰ “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.

¹¹ He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

¹² “Where is this man?” they asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said.

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided.

¹⁷ Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened."

The man replied, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹ "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

²⁰ "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. ²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

²⁵ He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

²⁶ Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

²⁷ He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

³⁰ The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. ³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

³⁴ To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

Spiritual Blindness

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

³⁶ "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

³⁷ Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

³⁸ Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

³⁹ Jesus said,^[a] "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"

⁴¹ Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains