

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Lent  
March 15, 2026  
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney  
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church  
Los Alamos, New Mexico

1 Samuel 16:1-13  
Psalm 23  
Ephesians 5:8-14  
John 9:1-41

This is the fourth Sunday of Lent. It is Laetare Sunday.  
Laetare is Latin for “rejoice,” and not just rejoice,  
but an imperative command to Rejoice, with an exclamation point.  
So, we lighten up this day in a season of dark and light. We need both.

When I was studying art history at the University of New Mexico,  
one of my favorite artists from the Renaissance was Caravaggio.  
He used a technique called Chiaroscuro, which imposed extreme contrasts between light and dark to  
create dramatic effects  
and increase the sense of depth on a two-dimensional canvas.  
It’s only with profound darkness of shadows that light shines so brightly.

“I want to live as a child of the light. I want to be with Jesus.”  
Or so the hymn goes. That sounds like the way, and the truth, and the life. The letter to the Church  
in Ephesus says so:  
“Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light.”

I’m all for the light, after all we just switched to Daylight Savings Time  
to push back the night, and we live in New Mexico  
where we get up to 350 days of sunshine a year.

But there is much to be said for the darkness. Barbara Brown Taylor wrote *Learning to Walk in the Dark*  
to cast away the dread of the dark  
and to explore all that darkness entails. She wrote:

“By most estimates, 70 percent of our sense receptors are located in the eyes. When they are  
working, they can take over most of the duties of all other senses. On a night with no moon,  
it is not only possible to see the distant glow of the nearest town on the horizon; if you lived  
on a prairie with no trees, you could see a single candle in a window ten miles away.”<sup>1</sup>

Like moths, our eyes are drawn to the light, and even more so when it’s surrounded by the darkness  
because too much light hurts.

One of the tortures used in “enhanced interrogation techniques”  
is the never turn off the lights in the persons cell,

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<sup>1</sup> *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor; HarperOne, Harper Collins Publishers, 2014; p. 92.

to subject them to intense light,  
to never allow them the cooling respite of darkness.

San Juan de la Cruz, the sixteenth century Spanish mystic,  
wrote of the Dark Night of the Soul.  
It is in the darkness that the soul finds solace and comfort,  
freed from the assaults of the day.

Interpreting St. John of the Cross, Franciscan Father Richard Rohr writes:

“When the dark night descends on the soul, its radiance blinds the intellect. She can no longer formulate concepts; she doesn’t even want to. It is tempting to consider this inability to engage the intellect as a failing. It is easy to assume that you are wasting time.

“Do not force it, John wrote. Stop trying to figure it out. Drop down into a state of guileless quietude and abide there. This is no time for discursive meditation, no time for pondering theological doctrines or asserting articles of faith.

“Your only task now is to set your soul free. Take a break from ideas and knowledge....  
Content yourself with a loving attentiveness toward the Holy One.”<sup>2</sup>

But you don’t have to be blind to not be able to see what is before you. Samuel sees fine, but he cannot perceive God’s chosen.

He would have picked any of the sons of Jesse  
because they looked like potential kings, just as Saul had looked the part. But it is not with the eyes that God discerns, but with the heart,  
and Samuel finally sees the light in the least of the sons of Jesse, David.

But what if you could not see the light?  
What if you had never seen the light? What if you were born blind?

Never to see the light. Never to have seen a sunrise.  
Never to have seen a sunset.  
Never to have seen the wind as it moves through a field of grass.  
Never to have seen – anything.

To be deprived of all that we, as sighted people, take for granted  
– being free to walk about without fear of tripping over stuff.

Stumbling is easy enough even when you have your sight.  
The disciples stumbled all the time, and so did the Pharisees.  
And if they didn’t stumble on their own, Jesus would trip them up.

They ask: WHY was this man born blind? What sin did he commit?  
What sin did his parents commit? Who sinned? Whose fault is it  
that this man was born blind.

We may think: they don’t understand. Poor ignorant peasants.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations; Week Twenty-Nine: The Dance of Darkness and Light  
Sunday, July 13, 2025.

Obviously, this was just some flaw in this man's genetic code that robbed him of his sight. It's not sin that's at fault. It's nobody's fault. The man's just blind.

But that's not what Jesus explains. It's not that stuff just happens. This man was born blind so that God's glory can be revealed. So, Jesus makes a little mud and sends the man off to wash, and VOILA – he can see.

Can you imagine what it must have been like for him?

Having your sight restored I can relate to. When I got my first pair of glasses, I recall what it was like to look out from my living room and see the trees. It was a wonder. No longer were the trees this great mass of green; I could actually see each leaf waving in the wind. The details I had missed for I don't know how long were suddenly brought sharply into focus.

It was much the same when I had surgery for cataracts. I'd worn glasses since I was in the sixth grade. During the intake I was asked whether I wanted the lenses to correct for near or far. My response: "I want to see the stars."

But being born blind, that's beyond what I can even imagine. To suddenly be able to see what the world looks like. To have the flood of light bombard your eyes and show you the world. To suddenly know what those things you've heard look like. And to realize that all those men of power around you, who have been born with eyes that see, cannot see the simple truth that you see.

Three times they ask him, and three times he tells them. This is what he did and this is what happened. Pish-posh they reply. He can't have done it. He's a sinner. It's the Sabbath. It didn't happen.

The man is puzzled, but he answers from his simple sight: "I don't know if Jesus is a sinner: One thing I know – I was blind – and now I see."

The authorities, the arbiters of right and wrong and the keepers of the law, dismiss the simplicity of the truth revealed here. "Go away – you're covered in sin." And he leaves. Jesus opened his eyes, and comes to him again, and reveals a deeper truth. "You were blind and now you see before you the Son of Man." The man sees and believes. The authorities do not. Though they have their sight, they cannot see.

Sometimes it's like that for us. We look but we don't see.

In some ways, we are all born blind.  
We require a parent, a friend, a teacher,  
someone who opens our eyes to the larger world around us.  
Someone who can help us put on the glasses of insight  
and see all that God has created,  
and to feel the light of God's love on our faces.

It's just so easy to get used to it all.  
I find myself numbed to the wonders I encounter every day.  
And then, I read of a man who was given a gift  
the wealth of which I cannot begin to imagine,  
and I begin to take the time to look and see.

The sun peeking over the mountains.  
The tint of color on the clouds.  
The wisps of grasses on the plain.  
The smiles on people's faces.

The gift of each of you, sitting here:  
so many divine lights  
blessing the world by your presence.