

Restore us, O God! We see.

LENT 4

Scripture

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

Focus statement

We are bombarded by visual images, and can mistake what is seen for what is true. God reveals hidden truths, surprising us and challenging our assumptions. Once our eyes and hearts are opened, we can see with greater clarity.

Song suggestions

THEME SONG:

STJ 29 You Are All We Have

HWB 166 I'll Praise My Maker

HWB 359 Lead Us, O Father

HWB 369 Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service

HWB 517 Open My Eyes That I May See

HWB 545 Be Thou My Vision

STS 5 Open My Ears, Open My Eyes

STS 39 Will You Come and Follow Me

STS 65 Abre mis ojos / Open My Eyes

STS 68 Kyrie

STS 115 Beauty for Brokenness

"Open the Eyes of My Heart" by Paul Baloche

"Our God" by Chris Tomlin

"I Want to Know You" by Sonic Flood

Call to worship

Leader: Here in this place we gather to worship.

All: *Open our eyes and our hearts.*

Leader: Here in this place we gather to see you.

All: *Open our eyes and our hearts.*

Leader: Here in this place we gather to perceive you in all your glory and beauty.

All: *Open our eyes and our hearts.*

Leader: Remove our blindness so that we might see ourselves honestly, and humbly worship you.

Offering prayer

With all that we have and all that we are, we honor you. Restore us, O God, to live in freedom and trust.

Confession and words of assurance

Leader: O God, you open our eyes to see what is true. We confess that sometimes it is easier for us to stay blind than to embrace the fullness of your truth.

People: **We admit that it is scary and unsettling to fully accept what you want us to see.**

Leader: Your truth exposes our hidden secrets, upsets our expectations, and establishes a new order where we are no longer leading the way. Forgive us, O Lord, when we would rather stay in the darkness of our current reality instead of receiving your miracle of light and new life.

People: **Remove the cataracts from our eyes, that we may see and celebrate your goodness around us. Quicken our minds, and soften our hearts, that we may recognize that you are at work.**

(Pause for silent confession)

Leader: God who brings all things into the light,

All: **restore us.**

Leader: The Lord is our shepherd, we shall not want. Though we cannot see through the valley of the shadow of death, God is with us. We will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

Sermon seeds

Samuel goes to anoint the next king, expecting that one of the older, stronger sons will be anointed. He is blind to the Lord's choice: the youngest and smallest son of the smallest clan of the smallest tribe of Israel will be king. "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7 NIV). David is hiding in plain view.

The story of the man born blind is a drama (comedy?) in six acts. The healing of the man from blindness to sight stands in stark contrast to the spiritual blindness of the sighted Pharisees. Jesus clearly finds it easier to heal the man born blind than to heal the blurry vision of the Pharisees, who expect that their way of seeing is the "correct" way. "The Lord looks at the heart."

In our Lenten frame of mind, do we have the strength and honesty to notice our own blindness, to look deeply for God's hidden truths right in front of us? We think we see clearly, but the great Revealer challenges our assumptions, turning old ways of thinking upside down, empowering those who have been powerless. Jesus is willing not only to restore our sight, but also to make a whole new creation in us. This kind of seeing and living has consequences for us and for the church.

Lenten ritual

Conduct an anointing ceremony as an invitation to receive God's anointing and healing. While people are coming forward, the congregation can sing "Take, O Take Me as I Am" (*STJ* 81) and other songs (from the suggested list or elsewhere).

Benediction

Go with your eyes wide open and your hearts softened to see the face of God in each person you meet—and to love them accordingly. Go in God's peace. Amen.