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Hello everyone! Happy New Year! Welcome to our very first Wednesday Word devotion of 2021 - thank you so much for tuning in and for taking this time out of your day to focus on God and focus on your faith.

So to kick off devotions for this year, I want to start with a powerful and perhaps unexpected story that comes in the middle of John's gospel. In coming off of the very challenging year that 2020 was for so many of us, to say the least, I want to start our weekly devotion practice being firmly rooted in God's action in the world. It may seem like, in the midst of all that is difficult or overwhelming or disorienting or just straight up weird, that we are on our own, and it can be hard to see how God is at work in the midst of so much brokenness and hardship in the world.

One way to be sure of God's action is to pay attention to the unexpected, the everyday, the perhaps mundane. And I can't think of many things more everyday or unexpected than Jesus using mud to heal a man who was born blind. So today, we are going to talk about mud. About messiness. And specifically, what happens when Jesus decides to use something as gross and mundane as mud to do extraordinary healing.

Today's scripture, or Word, comes from John 9:

*As he walked 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?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight."*

This is the Word of the Lord.

There's a lot to unpack in this story, but the main work here is that through the vehicle of mud and touch, Jesus healed a man's sight and used his work as a sign of God's work in the world.

At the time, people thought that if someone was born blind or with any other type of illness or disability, that it was because they or their parents sinned and it was a punishment. Of course, nowadays, we know that illness and disabilities are part of life and they are not punishment for sins - they reflect the range of what the human experience is. Jesus did not shy away from the difficulty or reality of the suffering, but instead chose to show God's healing and miraculous work through a person on the fringes of society. Kind of makes the name "Siloam" which means "Sent" sit a little differently.

In order to demonstrate the miraculous healing power of God, made real in our physical world, Jesus picked up mud off the ground, spat in it, rubbed it all over this guy's eyes and after washing it off, he was healed. He could see. He received the miracle and blessing of God's literally messy work in the world in one of the grossest ways possible. I love Jesus a lot anyway, but this story really solidifies that love. This healing is gross and weird and surrounded by beautiful proclamation of who Jesus is, the light of the world. Usually the really beautiful moments in our lives have come into place with some messiness and weirdness on either side of them too, and this story of Jesus really reflects that reality. Some of the most life-giving and life-saving things we do are messy and beautiful at the same time - childbirth, cooking and sharing meals with the people you love, marriage, keeping your home, hobbies

that involve creation and maintenance, building things, even mentally, emotionally, spiritually healing - it's a lot of hard and messy work but also a beautiful celebration of the possibilities of the life God gave us.

God meets us in the mess of this world, in the mess of being human. God does more than meet us, God heals us and touches us and gives us miraculous hope in the midst of what's messy and unexpected. Even in the most unlikely ways, by the power of Christ, God with us, we are given miracles and healing and hope. Not because we are good or have done something to earn this hope or healing or miracle, but simply because we are human. We are loved deeply. We are loved deeply and met by God just as we are, where we are. And if we simply look around, and don't discount the messiness of human life, within it we find God. We find hope and healing in the miracle of simply being alive.

So, dear friends, don't fear the messiness of what it is to be human. Though one of the worst years of recent memory is behind us, God is still at work in all the messiness and struggles and in our moving towards healing throughout this next year, this next chapter. We may be surprised at just how present and alive we are with Christ when we simply lean into the love of being human, including both the beauty and the messiness. God reveals who God is in healing with mud - and God continues to reveal that deep love of humanity even now, even today, even in the unlikely messes of life.

And now I invite you to join me in prayer, lifting to God our imperfect but honest and human words:

Lord God, creator of all things, we thank you for the true gift it is to be alive. Though sometimes it's hard to see life as a gift when things get really hard, we pray that you will meet us in those struggles. We pray that you will meet us in the messiness of life, of what it is to be human. Not only that you will meet us, but dear Lord help us to heal, help us to see the miracles of the world around us and your work in it, and help us to have hope. We hope and pray that we and our beloveds stay healthy in all the ways we need it. Thank you for the gift of our fellow people, beloved as they are, and with us in our messy journeys of being human. For the mud that you created and used for healing, Lord, we give you thanks. May we look for the humble and unexpected beauty of your created world and know that there is unending power in it. In your Son Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Have a beautiful rest of your day everyone! Peace be with you. Amen.