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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Fourth Sunday in Lent (Series A)

March 26, 2017

Text: John 9:1–41

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, we human beings are blind to the most obvious things. We fail to see what is most important. Take the events in today's gospel reading from John 9, for example. A man born blind is healed. For the first time ever, he sees the faces of people, the beauty of the sun and the splendor of God's creation. Think about the wonder of those first few moments when this man saw things for the first time.

And how do people respond at this great event? With rejoicing and celebration! With worship and praise offered to the Lord of creation who restores this man's eyesight. Hardly. There is endless debate. Is this the guy born blind or not? Some said yes, other said no. Call in the Pharisees, the religious leaders; they'll sort it out. The Pharisees, who are envious and jealous of the Lord, don't want to acknowledge that Jesus could perform such a notable miracle. They threaten and insult the blind man, now healed; they try to intimate his parents. And finally, when the healed man won't cooperate and denounce Jesus as a sinner, they cast him out of the synagogue.

Even before Jesus heals the blind man, our Lord's disciples think of him as a curious, yet perplexing theological question. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (vs. 2). Jesus has already performed a number of notable miracles, most notably the healing of a man who had been an invalid for 38 years (John 5). That miracle also sparked a huge debate. But did it occur to the disciples to ask Jesus to help the blind man of John 9? Or to ask if there was a way they could show him compassion? No. He's just a test case to tease out the perennial debate about the problem of evil and suffering in the world.

Why isn't anyone rejoicing that this man can now see? Surely that would be the most appropriate response along with worship and thanksgiving. Sadly, that is the way of human hardness and unbelief. God manifested in human flesh is performing God the Father's end-time work of saving and redeeming the world from the corruption of sin and death. And people are spittin' mad about it, blind to the light shining upon them.

But maybe we shouldn't be all that surprised. Jesus, in John 3:19, 21 has already prepared us for such reactions to His redemptive work, "¹⁹And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil...²¹But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." The Pharisees had a blindness much deeper and more profound than the man who couldn't see with his natural eyes.

God, in mercy, protect us from such blindness to Your saving light, Your Son Jesus.

Jesus doesn't answer the disciples' question about why the man was born blind. At least not with a nice, logical answer. Rather, He says, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (vs. 3). This answer changes everything for us Christians. Sin and suffering are real. Jesus doesn't deny these truths.

But our Lord gives us the perspective of faith that sees beyond a superficial cause and effect relationship between evil and suffering. In the midst of evil, including the evils we face in our own lives, God will accomplish His redemptive work of grace and mercy through Jesus. We have the promise that God will work through them for our good.

And lest we think this is all academic, with no real-world connection, Jesus includes us in this work. "*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" (vs. 4–5). The apostles of the Lord and then the apostolic Church built upon their witness and authority are co-laborers with the Lord Jesus in the redemptive work that Christ came to accomplish.

Earlier this year, during the Epiphany season, we heard Jesus teach, in the Sermon on the Mount, that His disciples are the light of the world (Matt 5:14). The world sees the good works committed to the Church and Jesus declares they will glorify God the Father (Matt 5:16). As Jesus is the light of the world so are we, His Church, the light of the world; we are to be busy and active in the work of Jesus. For those works of love and faithfulness bring glory to the Father by the grace of the Holy Spirit. While it is yet day, live out your lives of faith and holiness to the glory of God the Father almighty! "For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true...)” (Eph 5:8–9).

Then Jesus does the unexpected in order to demonstrate the works of God that we are called to participate in with Jesus. He takes some dirt, spits in it, and kneads it into mud. And then, Jesus takes the mud and places it in the man’s eyes and tells him to go wash in the pool Siloam. John writes, “So he went and washed and came back seeing” (vs. 7). The light of the world has dispelled the darkness of this man’s physical blindness!

You would think the Pharisees, of all people, would recognize God’s work being done in Christ Jesus. But as soon as they hear that Jesus made mud on the Sabbath they conclude, “This man (meaning Jesus) is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath” (vs. 16). The tradition of the Jewish elders stated that kneading dough is one of the 39 forms of work forbidden on the Sabbath. Jesus must have kneaded that dirt and spit together to make mud. Hence, Jesus broke the Sabbath. He’s a sinner. So give God the glory (vs. 24), O man once blind but now healed, Jesus couldn’t have done this! Are you kidding me?

But are we not faced with similar struggles of blindness when we go about the works Christ has given us to do? The Lord Jesus has committed to us the task of sharing the greatest message ever heard. The answer to the problems of sin, evil, and suffering is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Apply the disciples’ question to Jesus while He was on the cross, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that He is crucified in such ignominy?” Answer: “That the works of God might be displayed in Him.” On the cross, the light of God’s love for the world is manifested for all to see. Whoever believes in that crucified and resurrected Jesus will be saved and forgiven so that he “may be his own and live under him in his kingdom and service him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” God’s saving work is displayed in Jesus the crucified God-man.

What happens so often when we share that message of grace and love with people over coffee or at break time or across the fence? Don’t we get skeptical questions like, “Mustn’t I at least accept it or ask for it? What’s my part in all this?” Even among fellow Christians, don’t we get blinded when talking about Christ’s gift of baptism? How can “it work the forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and give eternal salvation to all who believe”? The same is true of the Lord’s Supper? How can bread and wine be “the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread

and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink”? These are the works of God given to the Church to share with the world. The light of Christ is manifested through them and people want to quibble, debate, and explain it all away!

Dear heavenly Father, protect us from teaching and living contrary to God’s Word. *We rejoice in the saving work of Christ on display today in Thomas’ baptism.* We rejoice that his parents and all you parents have brought your children to the waters of Holy Baptism. By so doing, you are joining in the work of Him who was sent by the Father to shine the light of grace and salvation. We rejoice in the preaching of Christ’s gospel of forgiveness, life, and salvation. We rejoice in the feast of eternal life given in the Lord’s Supper. We rejoice in the prayers and praises of God declared this day in this place for the life of the world!

The man’s blindness led to the work of God displayed in him. For not only did Jesus heal the man’s physical sight but our Lord also gave him eyes to see the light of the world. Through Christ’s grace and mercy, the man confessed, “‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him” (vs. 38). This is the first mention of worship, praise, and thanksgiving in this entire chapter!! The blind man sees the truth, the truth that is Jesus, the Son of Man come to do the works of God!

Dear Father, open our eyes to see the light of Christ that we may rejoice in your salvation unto the ages of ages ...

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.