

Sunday Morning Reflection March 22, 2020 – Lent #3

Scripture Passage – 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.”

Reflection

As I made the long drive from Newport News to Richmond, Indiana, I did so while listening to National Public Radio. There were a few miles in West Virginia where the transmission was lost, but for the most part NPR was my constant companion during the almost 11-hour journey. The topic of conversation, not surprisingly, was Covid19. In addition to having expert guests in the medical field who talked about how to identify the symptoms and others who discussed how to practice social distancing, for about two hours they took questions from the public and/or read statements from the public that were emailed to the show. Not surprisingly, there were some

Christians who suggested that the plight of Covid19 was God's judgment on the world, because of human sin.

This was not the first time I had heard or read such statements regarding Covid19. But I must admit, it was very disturbing to me that the only response from the church being heard during this broadcast, was judgment.

In the gospel lectionary passage for this, the third Sunday of Lent, Jesus heals a man born blind, and in a very strange, but inspiring way, answers the burning question of whether or not Covid19 is God's judgment on human sin. This story opens, like many in the gospels, with Jesus and the disciples journeying from one place to another. And as they walked, they came upon a man who had been born blind, and the disciples asked the question, "***Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?***"

In the disciples' way of ***seeing*** the world, any kind of illness or disease was believed to be the judgment of God. The disciples would have been taught since they were little boys, that when they ***saw*** a person with leprosy or a person born blind, either that person's parents or that person themselves, had sinned causing them to be a leper or a person born blind. This was how the disciples ***saw*** or ***interpreted*** the world around themselves.

In this passage, Jesus wants to change how the disciples ***see*** and ***interpret*** the world around themselves. So Jesus, rather than answering the disciples question by suggesting that it was either the man or his parents who had sinned causing the man to be born blind, Jesus suggests that this man's blindness "***happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.***"

Now Jesus' statement, read without the aid of the Greek, still implies that God caused the man to be born blind. The difference is not whether or not God caused the man to be born blind, the difference is that God caused the man to be born blind not because of God's judgment, but rather for the purpose of displaying the power of God to heal him at this very point in time. But either way, the man was born blind because God willed that the man be born blind.

But such an interpretation avoids the very clever way that Jesus used the Greek language. In the Greek, Jesus makes it clear that God was “passive” or not directly involved in the man’s blindness. In other words, God did not will that this man be born blind. But this is where the story really gets interesting. Because in as much as God was not actively involved in willing this man to be born blind, Jesus declares that God will be involved in the process of healing this man of his blindness “**so that the works of God might be displayed in him.**” In other words, God is not the cause of the man’s blindness, but God will be the cause of his healing!

One of the central issues of the gospels, has to do with **seeing**. In several places Jesus talked about **having eyes that see and ears that hear**. In those contexts, Jesus was not referring to literal eyes that see, but rather in those contexts **eyes that see** is a metaphor for “**seeing**” or interpreting the world around us with God’s eyes. Later in this same passage, Jesus again addressed the issue of sight. But in this later context the issue is not literal sight, but spiritual sight. Spiritual sight begins with seeing Jesus for who Jesus truly is, and then interpreting all of reality through Christ-inspired eyes.

So, what does all of this have to do with the Covid19 crisis? Very, very much indeed. As I drove to Richmond, IN and heard people’s statements read suggesting that God willed this horrible virus on humankind because of our sin, my mind immediately wandered to this passage. The disciples were obsessed with the issue of blame regarding the man’s blindness. That obsession reflected how they had been trained to “**see**” and interpret reality around them. Jesus worked tirelessly to change the disciples’ way of **seeing** or interpreting reality around them. In this passage, rather than **seeing** who is to blame in the reality of this man’s blindness, Jesus wants the disciples to **see** an opportunity to display the power of God by showing compassion to this man born blind.

As we continue to walk with God and one another (at a safe social distance!) in the midst of the Covid19 crisis, let me encourage each and every one of us to see in this crisis opportunities to display the greatness of our God. How can we do this? Well, let’s be intentional about reaching out to one another via texts, phone calls, emails or appropriate socially

distanced visits. Let's make sure that our seniors are safe and have everything they need. Let's "check-in" on neighbors to make sure they are well. I do not believe that God caused Covid19 to ravage the world, but as God's children we can display the glory of God and God's kingdom by how we respond to Covid19.

God Bless,

Pastor John