

## Sunday Message 22 March 2020

### WHAT WE LEAST EXPECT - No Sin?

#### John 9:1-41

1 As he walked 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 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.

4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.

5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

6 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,

7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

8 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?"

9 Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man."

10 But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"

11 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." 12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

14 Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see."

16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided.

17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner."

25 He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" 28 Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." 38 He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Our Lenten series WHAT WE LEAST EXPECT, takes us to this morning's theme, "No Sin?"

But first, our Gospel text is about the healing of a man born blind. In the United States, there are over 7 million persons with impaired vision, most of whom are over 60. Children born with such severe vision impairment that they are considered blind, children in the ages of birth through four years, number around 700,000. There are over 331,000,000 Americans, so children born blind amount to less than 2/10's of one percent of the population.

In Bible times, a man born blind wasn't just part of a very small group, he was also in a desperate circumstance. As a blind man, he couldn't see what was ahead, he had no security, and had to feel very vulnerable and alone. Though we may have little opportunity to know

what it is to be blind from birth, I would offer that given the circumstances of a nation on lockdown, with people unable to work, travel or even connect with friends and family (not even to mention the economic uncertainties), we are like the man born blind - we can't see what is ahead, we have no security, and we do feel very vulnerable and alone.

I guess we shouldn't be surprised that the disciples' response to a man born blind was, "Who sinned? He or his parents?" It's just like us to want to blame someone or something for the awful things that people suffer. That impulse goes all the way back to the first people, as we witness in Genesis Chapter 3. When confronted by God with their disobedience, Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent. In the very next chapter, when God confronts Cain with what he has done to his brother Abel, what does Cain say? "Am I my brother's keeper?" He tries to deflect the blame. And the entire Book of Job is an account of Job's three friends trying to convince Job that all his problems are his own fault. How did that help Job?

Jesus is out and about proclaiming the Kingdom of God. He isn't interested in who is to blame. Jesus says, "No one sinned, not him or his parents. This is so the works of God can be revealed in him." And Jesus then did what Jesus does. He made a poultice of mud and spit and wiped it on the guy's eyes, sent him to wash, and suddenly the blind man could see.

Jesus healing the man born blind was very much in keeping with work of the Messiah. Isaiah 29, 35, and 61 all declare that the promised one would heal the blind and set the captives free. And Jesus affirms that this is HIS business. In Matthew 11 Jesus says, in response to John the Baptist's disciples asking if Jesus is the "one," "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the one who does not fall away on account of Me."

The idea that bad things happen to people because of their parent's sin was taken care of centuries before Jesus. Deuteronomy 24, Jeremiah 31, and Ezekiel 18 all declare "Each one will die for his own sin." And how could someone born blind be responsible for his own impairment?

But if the disciples didn't get it, the Pharisees proved they were REALLY clueless. They questioned the man born blind who could now see, and came to the conclusion that he had

been healed by a sinner - because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, Jesus was obviously a sinner.

Isn't Obeying the Sabbath Law Important? Jesus said in Matthew 5, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. But Jesus also took the Pharisees to task for forgetting the "weightier matters of the law." Jesus said in Matthew 23 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness . . ."

Jesus also addresses the Pharisees notion that Satan was somehow working through Jesus. In Matthew 12 Jesus counters the Pharisees' critique, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." Jesus said to them: "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? . . . But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."

The final question this text asks us is "Why do people persist in their sins." That could also be asked, "Why do we blame others for our problems. Why don't we repent? Why do we choose fear over life saving help and hope?"

My favorite internet preacher, Jake Owensby, Episcopal Bishop of Western Louisiana, tells in his most recent blog post, about a recent meeting of the US House of Bishops, where an epidemiologist was addressing their assembly. Something he said caught Jake Owensby off guard. The expert said, "While all of us may not be infected by coronavirus, ALL of us will be exposed." Jake says he inwardly gasped. He started looking around at his fellow Bishops wondering if any of them could be already infected.

Why should we ALL be in this mess. I haven't traveled to a dangerous location. I have washed my hands and practiced social distancing. Why should I now be at risk?

One of the enduring lies we tell ourselves is that somehow "I am special, and should not suffer what everyone else suffers." We must remember two things that Paul said, ". . . for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3) and ". . . it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2). And Paul asserts that God has supplied the remedy, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." (I Corinthians 10)

We are not special. All of us are in the same boat. All of us are exposed. All of us are liable and culpable. And the best news is Christ is right in the middle of things with us.

We are tempted to think, “But this is different. No one has ever been through this before.” That’s not true. The United States suffered through a horrible outbreak of disease summer after summer through our first hundred years. The contagion was called yellow fever. In 1878, the plague hit Memphis, Tennessee hard. By August the city was nearly empty. Five thousand people were dead or dying. All their friends and family had fled, even the police (except for some hastily deputized African Americans) and doctors. The only ones who stayed behind were the religious, and they paid the highest price. Maybe you expect a Christian to respond in a different way. But these did what they believed Jesus would do. Six Episcopalian sisters, four Roman Catholic nuns, and two priests contracted, and eventually died, from the fever. They didn’t run away. They stayed. They laid down their lives for the sake of love.

Jake Owensby ends his post saying, “This world is a messy place. Everything we do affects everybody we encounter. Some of those effects are good. Others are ill. And even with the very best intentions, we sometimes make the mess worse. But apparently, there is no place that God would rather be than right here. With us.

Amen.