

Willow River Parish—Clear Lake, Deer Park, Forest United Methodist

John 9:1-17 (1-41)

As Jesus walked along, He saw a man who was blind from birth. Jesus' disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?"

Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents. This happened so that God's mighty works might be displayed in him. While it's daytime, we must do the works of Him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." After He said this, He spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and smeared the mud on the man's eyes. Jesus said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (this word means "sent"). So the man went away and washed. When he returned, he could see.

The man's neighbors and those who used to see him when he was a beggar said, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?"

Some said, "It is," and others said, "No, it's someone who looks like him."

But the man said, "Yes, it's me!"

So they asked him, "How are you now able to see?"

He answered, "The man they call Jesus made mud, smeared it on my eyes, and said, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and then I could see."

They asked, "Where is this man?"

He replied, "I don't know."

Then they led the man who had been born blind to the Pharisees. Now Jesus made the mud and smeared it on the man's eyes on a Sabbath day. So Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see.

The man told them, "He put mud on my eyes, I washed, and now I see."

Some Pharisees said, "This man isn't from God, because He breaks the Sabbath law." Others said, "How can a sinner do miraculous signs like these?" So they were divided. Some of the Pharisees questioned the man who had been born blind again: "What do you have to say about Him, since He healed your eyes?"

He replied, "He's a prophet."

1. Problems

Tragedy can strike quickly and without warning. While going about our everyday lives, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, the world can be changed. As a nation we've been living with that awful reality since 9-11. Thousands killed for no reason by complete strangers, who assumed, somehow in their mind, they were doing some good for this world. Then there are natural disasters: tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, tornadoes...if you have avoided tragedy at this point in your life thank God that you have been spared, but consider yourself lucky as well. Now, as a world, we are dealing with the COVID-19 virus and the uncertain nature it has brought to our everyday lives.

Haven't we all asked this question at one time or another in one form or another: why did God allow that to happen? Most of us know that God does not cause tragedy. The Bible states clearly that God does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of God. The greater problem for most believers is this: Why does God allow such awful things to happen?

Jesus' disciples asked Jesus this thorny question 2000 years ago. They met a man one day who had been born blind. In the first century, most people believed that all suffering was the result of sin. So the disciples asked Jesus, "Who sinned in this case, this blind man or his parents?"

There was even one school of thought that believed that a person could sin prior to birth, while still in the mother's womb. Imagine that!

2. **The Mystery**

The disciples want to know why this man was blind. They are so deep into the mystery of sin that they hope Jesus can give them a hopeful answer.

Jesus did not respond with a neat, simple answer to the problem of human suffering. No one can give you an answer to that problem that would cause you to say, "Aha, finally I have solved the mystery of evil and suffering in the world."

I am suspicious of anyone who talks too glibly about this age-old mystery. There was a British movie titled, "Whistle in the Wind." A group of kids had experienced the death of their pet kitten. They had prayed fervently that the cat would get well, but instead it died. They couldn't understand this. So, they went in search of the local vicar or pastor. They found him in a tea shop, taking a morning break, enjoying his tea and newspaper. They asked him, "Why did God let our cat die?" The good pastor was not delighted to be interrupted with the matter of a deceased cat. But out of duty he laid aside his paper and launched into a long, complex, theological response to the question. The children stood and listened intently. When he finished he wished them well and went back to his newspaper. The children walked away somewhat

bewildered. One little boy, holding his older sister's hand, looked up at her and said, "He doesn't know, does he?" How perceptive children can be. Never in this world will we understand all the mystery surrounding suffering. But with God's help we can gain some helpful insights.

As a pastor, I even have to admit that I don't know why there is suffering in the world. To profess knowledge, or even to appear so, in something we don't understand is wrong.

3. **To Be Made Whole**

The ultimate experience we can have in God is to be made whole. God's work is in making us whole. The one who was blind from birth was surprised by grace, surprised by Jesus, shockingly loved and chosen, and his vulnerability became the place where the good news that he, too, was deeply loved was made manifest. According to Kathleen Stone, senior pastor at Wharton United Community Church, the real injury in the blind man's life was the criticism from society, the criticism from the religious leaders.

The ultimate holy experience, and one that is throughout scripture, is to experience God as one who does not see as mortals see—who does not see us in all the ways others have judged us, raced us, held us down, and been aggressively jealous or arrogant toward us. Yet it is facing these judgments, oppressions, imprisonments, jealousies, and arrogances, and reflecting and focusing on God's love, grace, and mercy that will

heal us. The ultimate is that we are all yet beautiful, full, alive, living this life with the spirit of God deep in our hearts. The ultimate is that God chose to birth us from love and mercy, continues to love and give us mercy every day of our lives, and, at the end of our life, will receive us into arms of love and mercy.

4. **Love and Mercy**

God's love and mercy should be a regular part of our lives. They should be a regular part of our lives, as is breathing. We should look upon people and events through the lens of God's love and mercy. Our country is going through an unprecedented time—an experience we have never experienced before.

Those of us who are not ill should definitely practice the social distancing that is recommended. However, that should never stop us from being the Christians God calls us to be. We need to check in regularly with elderly friends and relatives to make sure they are doing well. As long as we are well, we can volunteer with organizations that are making other's lives better. We can send actual cards and letters, or e-mails, to people who are afflicted. As Christians, we are called to be a part of this world to the best of our abilities.

Judgment should not be a part of our lives at this point, if ever. A person's background or history means nothing right now—we are all beloved children of God. God created all of us. God wants well for all of us. We are the vessels to help make that happen.

5. **Distracted**

What takes us away from that which God needs us to do? We, as humans, are easily distracted.

Ray Osborne relays this story to us.

Satan called a worldwide convention. In his opening address to his evil angels, he said,

“We can’t keep the Christians from going to church. We can’t keep them from reading their Bibles and knowing the truth. We can’t even keep them from forming an intimate, abiding relationship experience in Christ. If they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken. So let them go to church, let them have their conservative lifestyles, but steal their time, so they can’t gain that experience in Jesus Christ. This is what I want you to do, angels. Distract them from gaining hold of their Savior and maintaining that vital connection throughout their day!”

The angels shouted, “How shall we do this?”

“Keep them busy in the nonessentials of life and invent innumerable schemes to occupy their minds. Tempt them to spend, spend, spend, and borrow, borrow, borrow. Persuade them to work for long hours, to work 6-7 days a week, 10-12 hours a day, so they can afford their lifestyles. Keep them from spending

time with their children. As their family fragments, soon, their home will offer no escape from the pressures of work.

“Over stimulate their minds so that they cannot hear that still, small voice. Entice them to play the radio or cassette player whenever they drive—to keep the TV, iPads, CDs, and their computers going constantly in their homes. And see to it that every store and restaurant in the world plays non-Biblical music constantly. This will jam their minds and break that union with Christ.

“Fill the coffee table with magazines and newspapers. Pound their minds with the news 24 hours a day. Invade their driving moments with billboards.

“Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, sweepstakes, mail order catalogues, and every kind of newsletter and promotional offering free products, services, and false hopes.

“Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from their recreation exhausted, disquieted, and unprepared for the coming week.

“Don't let them go out in nature to reflect on God's wonders. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, concerts and movies instead.

“And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotions.

“Let them be involved in soul-winning. But crowd their lives with so many good causes they have no time to seek power from Christ. Soon they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing their health and family for the good of the cause.”

It was quite a convention in the end. The evil angels went eagerly to their assignments causing Christians everywhere to get busy, busy, busy and rush here and there.

Has the devil been successful at his scheme? You be the judge.

6. The Challenge

There are times that challenge the Christian. This time of the Corona virus is certainly one of those times. We are challenged to live our Christian lives and values in a world of social distancing. The pandemic is a challenge.

Once we get through this challenge, there will be others that stem from the pandemic. There will be many people unemployed. There will be many who have lost their businesses. There will be equality issues. At all times, we will be challenged to live out and share our Christian values. We will be challenged to offer the love and grace of Jesus Christ to the world around us.

