

As Long As It Is Day John 9:1-25

Introduction

When our kids were younger and still at home, we would include a teen-focused devotional book among their Christmas presents. We thought it was a way to encourage their spiritual growth.

- One of the books stood out to me. It seemed to be pretty solid and useful, and it had the best title ever.
- The book was titled "If God Loves Me, Why Can't I Get My Locker Open?"

Now you might think that getting your locker open is not a big deal but let me assure you – based on my own personal experience as an undersized, geeky freshman who was assigned a school locker in a hallway of upper-class athletes – it truly was a legitimate question.

- My pulse rate goes up just remembering those days!

Today, the events of our lives and of our world easily result in similar and equally legitimate unanswered questions about how God operates.

- One of those questions shows up in our Gospel text today.

As (Jesus) went 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?" (John 9:1-2)

Let me phrase this question in another way:

Why do bad things happen?

Not "why do bad things happen to good people" or even "why do bad things happen to bad people" but "why do so many bad things happen?"

- Why is our world filled with so much pain and suffering?

And for the disciples in today's text, the question was "why did that bad thing (being born blind) happen to that man?"

Behind the question is the very common belief in Jesus' day that ALL human suffering happened because somebody committed a sin. So bad things were a consequence of a sin committed.

- In the minds of most people at that time – and certainly in the minds of the disciples – a person born with any kind of disability – like blindness – meant somebody sinned.
- Either the baby in the womb or the baby's parents.
- In fact, some Rabbis taught that it was possible for a person to commit a sin BEFORE they were born. In utero.
- Follow the logic, and the assumption is that if no one sinned, this man would have been born with 20/20 vision.

We look at that attitude today and dismiss it, right? No one believes like that anymore! Or do we?

- Have you ever asked yourself “What did I do to deserve this?”
- Or seen someone get what they deserve?
- Or credited something like karma?
- You assume that the bad thing is a consequence of something you or they did.

When I was almost six, my mom gave birth prematurely to stillborn twins. They were named Todd Eric and Tamela Sue. So with my brother Tim, the kids in our family would have been known as Tommy, Timmy, Tammy and Todd. I know. What were my parents thinking? Poor Todd. His name didn't rhyme ... but there simply weren't enough vowels.

- Not only were my brother and sister premature, Todd had a severely misshaped leg. Had they survived, Todd would never have walked.
- My mom was a woman of great faith, but to the day she died, she wrestled with this very question: “What did I do to cause this?”

For Mom, and for people today who struggle with this question, end up with ...

- A lifetime of guilt over something that wasn't their fault
- Maybe a damaged relationship with God or with the people closest to them
- There have been marriages that were destroyed over similar struggles

For this man in our Gospel text, and for his parents, the consequences of this kind of thinking were severe as well.

- People did not see them as individuals in need of grace and mercy. They saw objects of conversation and gossip. “What do you think they are hiding?”
 - The disciples saw someone to accuse, not someone to heal.
- The blind man had no way of earning a living, so he was reduced to sitting along the road and begging in order to survive.
- The parents, if they were like my mom, felt a great deal of guilt over something they had never done.
- Plus, as a Jew, if you had an unconfessed sin, you were not allowed to worship in the Temple.

Now, in this series of sermons that lead up to Easter Sunday, we are focused on what it means when we pray that line in the Lord's Prayer that sounds like this:

THY KINGDOM COME

Jesus taught us to pray those words. And He clearly told us that the Kingdom is not only a future cosmic event, but the Kingdom is also present wherever He is. Luke 17, for example.

... the kingdom of God is in your midst. (Luke 17:21)

And our memory verse:

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13-14)

We can pray for it to come now ... because we are in it!

- But sometimes it is hard to see the kingdom when everything around us is bad.

So how does the kingdom of God come to a blind man and his parents? And how does it come to us when we too are facing the questions about why bad things are happening to us and to the people we know?

Jesus responds to that question in four ways:

RESPONSE #1: JESUS SAW

Look at verse 1:

As Jesus went along, he saw a man blind from birth. (John 9:1)

I don't want to oversell this point, but I do think it is important to note that Jesus is the one who saw the blind man. It seems that no one else did.

- The text does NOT say: Jesus and the disciples saw ...

It is a line that is repeated often in the ministry of Jesus. He saw the beggar. He saw the widow. He saw the leper. He saw.

- Jesus saw the needs of people. He saw their hurts.
- No other Jewish man would have even looked at the Samaritan woman in last week's text.
- So whatever was going on in the life of that blind man and his family ... Jesus saw it.

We humans have developed the capacity to NOT SEE the needs of people. But Jesus saw.

As I was preparing this sermon, I thought of a hymn that my Mom used to sing and play a lot. This was a woman who buried two children, buried her father, endured breast cancer, uprooted her family to move away because her husband had been called into the ministry. And I never knew why until the Lord let me know it for this sermon.

Jesus knows all about our struggles
He will guide till the day is done
There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus
No not one, no not one

RESPONSE #2: JESUS CHALLENGED

Look at verse 3:

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus ... (John 9:3)

Remember, everyone believed this blindness was the direct result of sin. Somebody sinned. It was the only possible reason for this bad thing.

And certainly both the man and his parents had at some time during their lives had committed sin. Everyone has. Remember Romans 3:23:

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

Jesus did not see their sin as the cause of the man's blindness. He challenged the conventional thought. There is another reason, Jesus would teach them.

Now let me be quick to say this: In the final analysis, everything bad in this world is the result sin, because when Adam and Eve allowed that first sin to happen back in the garden everything was put into a cycle of decay. Read Genesis 3 and Romans 5 to learn more.

- Death, decay, wars, fights, disease, weeds, thistles – all of it – broke into this world back in Genesis 3.
- I had to have my knees replaced because sin exists in the world. My original parts wore out ... not because of any sin I have done, but because we live in a world that has been tainted by sin.
 - My lifetime guarantee was destroyed in the Garden of Eden.

But afterward, to blame this man's specific disability on a specific sin committed by specific persons is certainly beyond any man's ability or authority. Only God knows why babies are born with handicaps, and only God can turn those handicaps into something that will bring good to the people and glory to His name.

RESPONSE #3: JESUS INVITED

Look at the last half of verse 3:

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” (John 9:3)

The translation here is unfortunate. It makes it sound like God deliberately made the man blind so Jesus could come along 25 years later to perform a miracle. That would be cruel!

The Greek language does not have punctuation, so we have to put it in for it to make sense to the modern-day reader. I think the text is supposed to be read like this:

Jesus brings the Kingdom into this story by inviting people to look for what God is doing in the midst of the bad stuff that is happening.

- In this case, Jesus healed the man.

- But on that day, there others who were not healed.
- Just like today ... some people are healed; some are not. Some relationships are restored; some are not.

But no matter what happens, Jesus invites to look and see what God is doing in the midst of it all.

About 10 years ago now, our son-in-law had a major brain event that eventually caused his death. Many of you are aware of that event.

- What you may not know, or may not remember is that a year before that he had an aneurysm burst in his head – right in the front between his eyes.
- The doctors at Miami Valley Hospital went in to repair that aneurysm.
 - The first step was to go in to find the exact location and to measure the size of the rupture so they could fix it with the right size replacement part.
- While they worked, we prayed.
- What was supposed to be a relatively brief procedure took several hours because the rupture they found in the first step could not be found when they went in to repair it. That's why it took so long! They couldn't find it.
- The only possible conclusion was that God had healed. No one questioned that. Not even the doctors.
- After his death from the second event, an autopsy was performed.
- That autopsy showed that Nate's entire brain had been destroyed ... except for a place at the front of his head right between his eyes.
- When she learned about this finding, my daughter told me "Dad, when God heals something, it stays healed."

Nate's death was a tragedy. But even in the tragedy, we were still able to see what God was doing.

- That's what Jesus invites us to.
- Look for the kingdom, even in the midst of the bad that surrounds you.

APPLICATION

Our memory verse for this Lenten season:

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13-14)

Amen.