

**John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39**

“For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” Jesus’ disciples were not taught this law in physic’s class, and yet they applied it, in principle, to the man who was born blind. In order for him to have been given such an affliction at birth, they were thinking, somebody must have done a terrible sin. “Rabbi,” they asked Jesus, “Was it him or was it his parents?”

Apparently they had forgotten the story of Job who suffered greatly not because of something he had done, but because God allowed Satan to afflict him. If all suffering is the result of the sins that we have committed, then we can look around this room and figure out who are the worst sinners here. They would be the ones who are afflicted with all sorts of physical and emotional troubles. And perhaps to some extent we do that, at least in our own minds. But this would also mean that Christians who live in countries like Kenya, and the Philippines, and Sudan, and Somalia who undergo much suffering and affliction are worse sinners than us. But if we believe that then we are as darkened in our thinking as Jesus’ disciples were.

And yet, have you ever asked yourself, perhaps even said it aloud, “What have I done to deserve this?” A sickness, a chronic disease, a financial burden, or just a really bad day? For some reason we have come to see suffering and affliction as a sign that we are out of favor with God; that we have done something to irritate Him; that He is, perhaps, punishing us.

But not even in the Garden of Eden was suffering meant for our punishment. God did not curse the ground allowing thorns and thistles to grow, making it difficult for man to provide for his family, because God was mad. It was to keep us humble; to keep us mindful of the fact that we are mortal; that we are not our own god, and that we will die. It was to keep us looking to God alone for life and for every good thing. And God did not multiply woman’s pain in childbirth because He was ticked off at Eve and He wanted all women to suffer as a result. It was to be a painful reminder that God brings good out of evil; that though we are woeful sinners, He would bring forth His Son to be our Savior through that very pain of child-bearing.

Perhaps the blind man, himself, even had the attitude that somehow he was deserving of blindness. He was not crying out to Jesus to heal him. Unlike the others who sat by the road and begged for help, this man seemed to be content to remain blind. But even without our prayer God comes to our aid. Jesus stopped, applied mud to the man’s eyes, and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam, and “he came back seeing.”

And now the story really gets interesting. The Pharisees became very angry that this man was healed on a Sabbath Day. “Only a sinner would do such a thing, heal on the Sabbath!” How ironic, therefore, that the disciples’ question had been, “Who sinned that this man was born blind?” And now the Pharisees’ question is, “Who sinned that this blind man’s eyes are opened!”

I suppose this could be called an “open and shut” case, or “damned if you do, and damned if you don’t.” It was sinful for the man to be born blind, and it was sinful for the man to be able to see again, at least in the eyes of the Pharisees. But that’s because, while seeing, they

refused to see. They could see the sins in others but not in themselves. They could see when someone was blind, but they could not see that they were blind to what Jesus was doing for them.

Jesus is God in the Flesh who was walking through this world of suffering giving sight to the blind, making the lame to walk, healing lepers, driving out demons, because all of these afflictions were pointing to the cross where He would suffer once and for all, for every sinner on earth. They were all asking the wrong question. Rather than, “Who sinned?” the better question is, “What has God done about my sin?” What Jesus did for the blind man was to heal his affliction. But even more than that, after the man could see, Jesus found him and He told him who He was, and the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshipped Him.

Each one of us is a sinner, and each one of us suffers in this life. We suffer not because we have irritated God and He is afflicting us; we suffer because we live in a sinful world and we ourselves are sinners. Some suffer more than others for reasons God alone knows; but we all suffer, and more than that, we all have a Savior who suffered for us, and God wants us to fix our eyes upon Him.

Each and every day the answer to the question, “Who sinned?” is “You sinned,” and “I sinned.” But God’s answer hangs on a cross where Jesus paid the price for your sins. When life takes a bad turn and you want to ask God, “What have I done to deserve this?” fix your eyes on Jesus who gives you what we do not deserve—eternal life in heaven. Through Holy Baptism, through His Word and Sacrament, God has opened, and keeps your eyes opened to see Jesus and to fix your eyes upon Him.

“For judgment,” Jesus says, “I came into the world that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” Jesus did not come to judge you. He came to be judged for you. Are you a sinner? Jesus became the sinner on the cross in your place. Are you deserving of punishment? Jesus was punished for you. He was condemned to hell, He suffered hell’s fury, He was judged, and because your name was written on His cross, you are declared innocent; you are forgiven of all your sins; you have life and salvation in Him.

Is this what you seen in your baptism? Is this what you see in Holy Communion? Is this why you come to worship Him? If “yes,” it is because He has opened your eyes to see. There are billions of people on earth who do not see. Many of them have heard of Jesus. Many of them have a Bible. But they do not see. Their eyes are closed to what Jesus did for them on the cross. Their eyes are closed to what God does for sinners in His Word and Sacraments. Many of them have witnessed a Christian baptism. Many of them have driven past a Christian church. They can see a building, but they are blind to what God is doing there through the preaching of His Word. They can see water, bread and wine, but they are blind to the truth that Christ Himself is in these very things.

When someone who was blind is made to see, it is life-changing for him. The man blind from birth, after Jesus healed his eyes—do you think he went through life after that with his eyes half-shut? Surely not! There was so much to see. A whole world to look at! All the colors, and shapes, and people’s faces. Don’t you think that man, from that day on, was like a child in a candy store...looking with delight at each and every treat?

Are we not like him? Since Christ has opened our eyes to our salvation in Him, why would we close our eyes to His Word? Why would we refuse to read and study His Scriptures? Since Christ has opened our eyes to what He has done for us by His sufferings, death, and resurrection, won't we as Christians keep our eyes fixed on Him? Won't we delight to come to His Holy Supper? Won't we treasure our catechism? Won't we look for ways to serve Him in life? Or have we, like the Pharisees and like so many others, become those who, while seeing, refuse to see?

Remember, friend, that Jesus was judged for you. He suffered hell for you. God, therefore, forgives you for all your sins. This is the "Gospel truth." Jesus closed His eyes in death so that you can open yours one day in heaven. Jesus entered into the dark tomb so that He now is with you as your Light and Path through life. There is no darkness in Christ. There is only light, and life, and forgiveness. And so "walk as children of Light," with eyes wide open to His words of grace for you. Amen.