

March 26, 2017
4th Sunday in Lent

From Jesus to Us . . . Grace

St. John 9:1-7

Pilgrim Lutheran Church, 2155 N. Oakland Ave., Decatur IL 62526

Dear Friends in Christ,

I was remembering an account of a young father-to-be who was pacing the floor in a hospital waiting room while his wife was in labor. Now, obviously, this was before a father participated in the delivery of his child. Anyway, a nurse finally entered the waiting room and said to him, "Congratulations. You have a little girl." The new father gave a great sigh of relief and said, "How thankful I am it's a girl. She'll never have to go through the agony I've gone through tonight!" So much for reality.

It's amazing how we often see things, isn't it? Even more amazing are the times we don't see the obvious. And when we consider our spiritual condition before the Holy Spirit entered our lives...well...we were blind.

From Jesus To Us. Ours eyes are to be opened in order to see what is given us as Christ makes His way to Calvary. This Sunday . . .

GRACE

I. The Darkness

I would like for us to keep in mind these words from our Old Testament Lesson:

And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know; in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them. (Is. 42:16).

First, we are to understand that the blindness discussed in this text is spiritual blindness. This Old Testament lesson and Jesus' confrontation with the man born blind impress upon us the fact that physical healing and spiritual healing are dependent upon God. In the Old Testament lesson God says, "I will lead...I will guide...I will turn...These are things I do...I do not forsake." It's what God does for us.

Secondly, we want to note that our Epistle lessons begins with, "for at one time you were darkness." (Eph. 5:8a). That connects to the Old Testament lesson and God's statement, "And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know...". That is to say, God will take the spiritually blind and give them spiritual eyes to see the light of His love in Jesus Christ. But, again, the statement Paul makes is, "for at one time you were darkness."; not **in** darkness. Commentator Armin J. Panning notes:

When Paul says, "[They] were once darkness,"...is taking it a step further. Not only were they misled and under the influence of wicked paganism, they themselves were a bad influence. They were the darkness that misled others... (Armin J. Panning, *Galatians, Ephesians, The People's Bible*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2000, pp. 196-197)

Well, that's where we were! And the consequences were and are horrible in life and death. And so, the opening words of our text:

II. The Grace

“As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” (vv. 1-2).

That’s the way we like to look at situations, isn’t it? “So-and-so is having this problem!” or “Did you hear what happened to so-and-so?” We listen and diagnose. We love to diagnose, don’t we? “Well, if so-and-so would have done this or that, or if so-and-so had not done this or that, then so-and-so wouldn’t be in such a mess! Man, I’d never do that!” Maybe. But, then again, what have we done that has resulted in unwanted consequences? Think about that!

“Jesus answered, ‘It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.’” (v. 3).

In the first place, we’re talking Grace, here. The love of God for that which doesn’t deserve it. We are to understand life’s ills in the context of Christ’s Cross. Christ is moving to Calvary to suffer and die for our sin and the troubles it has brought us. It’s what Scriptures teach: “The wages of sin is death.” - and all the “bad stuff” that leads up to death as the result of sin! And this from Scripture: “For our sake (God) made (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor. 5:21).

In the second place, we would do well to keep this Word from the Lord in front of us: “For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Fear not, I am the one who helps you.”” (Is. 41:13). He doesn’t take away the hard moments. And, again, we often experience the earthly consequences from our on-going struggle with sin - but, and again, these words lift us: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom 8:1).

In the third place, for many other situations - such as the one in our text - there is another answer. Christ put it this way: “that the works of God might be displayed in him.” And in all situations, most of us very quickly run to these words of Scripture: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28).

I was re-reading some insights, from some years ago, given by a blind Lutheran pastor. He said:

“Thirty-one years after losing my sight, I can honestly and joyfully affirm how God has used my blindness for his glory and even my own good... I have the privilege of reaching, touching, and talking to many blind people and, by God’s grace, to help them see the hand of God in the middle of their darkness. That probably would never have happened if I had been fully sighted.

“Blindness has also been a blessing to me. I can walk past the glass cookie jar full of cookies and not be tempted. I don’t have to hassle with traffic. (And he thanks those who serve as his drivers.) Nor am I in fear, for I am not aware when the near misses happen. I will not even get into clothing, television, magazines, and

other temptations that through sight lure and entice people to sin.”

III. A Touch

And get this: The grace of God is given to us in what we can call *A Touch*.

Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. (vv. 6-7).

"He anointed the man's eyes"; touched them and attached to that touch His Word: "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam". The "touch", His Word of Command, a healing. The blind man did nothing more than receive. Grace!

And we cannot get side-tracked by the use of saliva. The Lutheran pastor I mentioned just a moment ago said of this incident:

When a blind person stands in a crowd or at a distance from someone who is talking, he or she cannot be sure that the words spoken are for him or her. Because of Jesus' touch, his closeness, there was no doubt in the blind man's mind that Jesus was talking to him.

It's rather obvious, don't you think? We all need and want the presence of God in a way that personally touches our lives. And that's what He gives us. He gives us the written and spoken word and attaches the promise: "The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...". (Rom. 1:16). He has individually touched our lives in Baptism with His Word connected to water. Not water that washes away dirt, but water connected to the promise: "be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." And this: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27). He touches our lives in His Supper where we are fed the forgiveness of sin. "Take, eat; this is my body.'...(and of the cup) 'Drink of it, all of you for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" (Matt. 24:26-28)

Everything Christ gives us in Word and Sacrament speaks of His love, mercy, forgiveness and every assurance of His Presence. His journey to Calvary is the price necessary to pay for the sin of the world - yours and mine. It's **from Jesus to Us**. And whoever believes.....has eternal life!!

Amen.

Pastor William K. Abbott