

Lent 4 – March 22, 2020
Text: John 9:1-41
Theme: Why Me?

Jesus came across a man who was born blind. Notice the first question the disciples had for him. It was not, “Lord, can we help him with his difficult lot?” It was not, “Lord, can you heal him?” They did exactly what we do so often. They sought to assign blame. When we see a person who is in a difficult spot, it is human nature to try to figure out if he did it to himself. I guess somehow the world seems like a more just place when everyone gets what they deserve as long, of course, as I don’t get what I deserve. See, if I can assign blame for a person in a difficult situation, then I can feel safe because I have made the right choices when he made the wrong ones. If human beings devoted 1/10 of the amount of energy to solving the problem that we do to assigning blame, we would be able to move mountains.

The disciples wanted to know whose fault it was that the man had been born blind. They were correct in understanding that all sickness and disability comes from sin, but they missed the point that it is not a one to one correlation. Whose sin caused this man to be born blind, his or his parents? That question assumes a one to one correlation between a particular sin and a particular consequence.

Now, children do indeed suffer for their parents’ sin. We see the reality of that in the Church today. Speaking generally and not specifically about any particular family, why do we see such a decline in the Church today? At least one major contributing factor is this scenario. Let’s say

that a couple who grew up in the 1940's were raising their kids in the 1970's. And let's say they treated the church more like a social club than the absolute center of life. Mom and Dad were faithful believers, they just didn't think that Jesus had to be the center of everything like he had been when they were growing up. So they only came to church once a month or so and Sunday School wasn't all that fun so they didn't make the kids go every week. Rather than being in Sunday school and worship every Sunday as they had been, their children were sporadic in Sunday school and only in worship for Christmas Eve, Easter, Mother's Day and a few other random Sundays. Their children never formed the bonds with the Church that they had formed. They didn't know who their Sunday school teacher was much less excitedly recognize her at the Jewel. Their pastor was just some guy up front at church who didn't know their names. When those children grew up and had children of their own, church was even less a part of their lives. So their children didn't see it as an important factor at all. The Church moved from the center of the family life to something as peripheral as a favorite restaurant. That is how the sins of the parents effect the children. If the parents had devoutly kept the 3rd Commandment, to keep the Sabbath holy, it would be more likely that the Church would be the center of their children's lives – not a guarantee, but more likely.

However, thankfully, no one suffers for another's sin in a one to one correlation. We suffer because sin exists, and sin exists until Jesus returns. So, sitting around and trying to decide who is to blame is a huge

waste of time. It is all of our faults. We are all to blame. Confirmation students sometimes blame Adam and Eve. If they hadn't eaten from the tree from which God commanded them not to eat, we would not have fallen into sin. I always say, before you blame Adam or Eve, you stop sinning. When you have completely stopped sinning yourself, then you can be a self-righteous prig and blame whomever you like.

Jesus pointed out to the disciples that fault is meaningless. Sin is your fault. Sin is my fault. There is no way to assign a correlation to any sin. I can assign blame for every sin going back generation to generation until we get all the way back to Adam and Eve but in the end, the sin is yours. Own it. I grow weary of people blaming their parents for all they do wrong. I don't care if you were raised by Jack the Ripper and Lizzy Bordon, at some point you have to take responsibility for your own choices and your own sins. Own it.

Having said that, however, look what Jesus says to the question of why the man was born blind,

"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Have you ever considered that when what we think of as bad stuff happens, it has nothing to do with the fault of anyone? Not only that, perhaps it is not bad. Is COVID19 China's fault? President Trump's fault? Is it a bad thing? Well it may seem bad but is God's promise to work all

things for our good? Either you believe that you are in the palm of God's hand or you don't. If you do, then nothing really "bad" can happen to you. Anything that happens will be turned for your good and the good of those who love God. We face difficulties and challenges in life and, yes they all come from sin because all difficulties and challenges come from sin, but they are not for punishment. Jesus was punished in Hell for all sin. The payment has been made. Now, every challenge, every disability, every problem, even COVID19 is to show the glory of God in our lives.

Let me tell you about my friend, Louise. She sat in her hospital bed slowly dying of cancer. She was a devoutly Christian woman and had been ready to die for months. But she kept living; hardly eating, unable to get out of bed anymore, too weak to even hold her Bible to read it. She said many times that she did not know why God was keeping her here. At her funeral, dozens of people from the hospital and nursing home came: Buddhists, Hindus, atheists, agnostics and Christians. They all came to see the God about whom Louise had told them and to marvel at the faith he had given to this mightily valiant woman. Louise never knew, this side of heaven at least, that the most important work of her life, her magnum opus, was done when she was the weakest. That was when God used her to show forth his magnificent glory. That cancer was not because Louise had sinned, or because her parents had sinned. It was so that the works of God might be displayed in her. Folks, it's not about us. How is God displaying his works in you? How is he using you to show forth his love and mercy? That's all that really matters.