

Sermon 2008 Lent 4

Text: John 9: 1-7

Theme: "Why Good Things Happen to Bad People"

I think you probably have heard of the book "Why do bad things happen to good people?" It is a book often read by people who are trying to cope with the extraordinary difficulties in life. Just when you think you have all your ducks in row, along comes some new disaster. Sometimes those disasters just seem to pile on and pile on and people naturally begin to wonder,

"What did I do to deserve this?" The man who wrote the book "Why do bad things happen to good people" tried to answer this question but I think his hypothesis was all wrong. It was just exactly backwards because there is no such thing as a good person. Either we believe what the Bible says or we don't.

Psalm 51:5 (ESV)

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

If you and I were brought forth in iniquity and conceived in sin, how can anyone be good?

1 John 1:8 (ESV)

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

We cannot be good if we are sinful. So since we know that we are sinful...then there is no such thing as a good person. Of course we try to quantify it by saying,

"Well yeah pastor, I may not be good, but I'm not as bad as that guy. Maybe I drink too much but at least I'm not doing cocaine. Maybe I speak badly about my neighbor and destroy his reputation but it's not like I'm shooting people dead at Lane Bryant."

Well, that's probably true but once that doctor pulls the sheet up over your face and the mortician is wheeling you out to the hearse, does how you died make you any less dead?

Ephes. 2:1-3 (ESV)

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— [3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of

our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

It seems to me that the appropriate question is not "Why do bad things happen to good people but rather why does anything good ever happen to such bad people?" Trying to explain why bad things happen to God's people has been going on since Cain slew Able. The Jews decided that if you did good works you had good things happen to you and all bad things were the result of your sin. When Jesus and his disciples saw the man who was born blind, the thought hit them, "how could a condition with which one was born be because of his own sin? Could it be that the child was held accountable for the sins of the parents?" That's a frightening thought!

John 9:2 (ESV)

"And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Someone must have been really bad to get blindness delivered to their kid right? But look at what Jesus says.

John 9:3 (ESV)

"Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."

Why do bad things happen to people? So that the works of God might be displayed. Now that puts a whole new spin on suffering doesn't it? People are born blind. Relationships are killed. People get cancer. People struggle with depression and various mental illnesses, and through all that stuff, the works of God are displayed. St. Paul says,

2 Cor. 12:9 (ESV)

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

So, here's where we are. There is no such thing as a good person. We are all miserable sinners and no sinner is worse than another because all sin is damnable and all sin is forgiven by the same blood of Christ.

Because we are all sinners and we live in a world destroyed by sin, things break and fall apart. Nothing is perfect. Everything dies. Sickness, disease and brokenness are part of life.

But God takes what we consider to be a tragedy and uses it to display his glory. The promise is in Romans 8.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” That means that everything in our lives eventually works together for good. Christ died to pay for the eternal consequences of our sin. Our salvation is secure by virtue of our Baptism into his death and resurrection, but, what about the journey that we are on in this life? Because Christ has freed us from the curse of the law, we are free to journey joyfully or miserably.

Every one of us has a two-year-old inside us that is just dying to get out. We learn to cover up the two-year-old with grown-up manners and grown-up words, but he’s still there, ready to throw a tantrum every time things don’t go the way we thing they should. He’s there, ready to hit and scream and cry and demand that the world revolve around him. But the reality is that the broken world is what it is and we have to traverse this valley of death and no amount of fit throwing will change reality. It will only alienate us from our brothers and sisters who we need for the journey. All who have been

Baptized into the promise can eventually get to heaven but how we get there is our choice. We can either walk through life whining and being miserable because things are not working the way we wanted them to work, letting the inner 2-year-old have free reign. Or we can walk through life in excited expectation of what God may reveal next. We can gripe and complain about that which is not ours, or we can spend our time on the journey rejoicing in the blessings he has given us. We can fight and bicker with one another over every perceived offense or we can trust that God has already brought complete justice to our lives and we only await the fulfillment. We can try to make sure that we are getting at least as much as we are giving or we can give of ourselves and our love as freely as God has given to us.

It's like I said at the beginning. Either we believe God's word or we don't but if we do believe him, there is a great deal more joy in life than if we don't. AMEN