

See the Mud!

King of Glory Lutheran Church
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John 9:1-41

¹As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from

God, he could do nothing.”³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

In this time of Coronavirus, God is at work behind this chaos that we cannot control! We have a spiritual opportunity to let go of preconceived notions to see God's action. God's light is stronger than our darkness.

As usual it was another rainy day in Portland, Oregon. Her son went out to play as he usually did. He loved the rain. It brought out all sorts of worms to watch and created little puddles and streams for floating home-made boats made of popsicle sticks. Then of course, if the day brought a hard rain, there would be mud!

Oh he loved the mud. God gave boys an extra chromosome that attracts them to mud like fireflies to light. He jumped in the mud! He stomped! He ran. The dirtier his pants got the better. Oh blessed mud!

When her son returned home, the mother just smiled. The muddied pants and jacket of course created extra work at the laundry machine – that was the down side. But he just had so much fun! There was no need for scolding when her boy loved the mud!

The blind man felt this smooth wet substance being put upon his eyes. The hands were firm upon his eyelids, but comforting as well. Jesus' voice was steady. Prayers were said. He was led to the pool to wash. As the mud came off, there was light! Well that was its name but the man didn't know its name. He only knew that his eyes began to make out shapes in front of him. Yes! They were people! He could see!

That's when the chaos started.

The disciples and neighbors don't understand it. Neither do the religious teachers or even his parents! They keep asking the formerly blind man to explain.

“Is it really you? It certainly doesn't look like you!” (“Yes it's me!”)

“Well how can you see? You were blind!” (“I don't know. But I see!”)

“This man (who healed you) is a sinner.” (“I don't know that. But I know I see!”)

“How did he open your eyes?” (“You must not be listening! I don’t know. But I know I see!”)

Jesus gave the disciples the answer before he made the mud. He said, “I must do God’s works while it is day. I am the light of the world.”

The basis of all their questions were theological.

“Well, who sinned? You or your parents? Someone is to blame for your blindness!”

In first century Israel, if you were sick, or couldn’t have children or were a leper, then you must have sinned. Or someone you knew sinned. There was a direct connection between sin and your present life condition.

There had to be a reason for his blindness! But Jesus says, “No! The man was born blind so that God would be seen. God wants me to do God’s works so you all will see them.”

Jesus was asking all the people who knew the blind man to dismantle their preconceived notions about illness and sin. No one was to blame for the blind man’s blindness. He was simply blind to glorify God.

Right now, we are having to dismantle our preconceived notions about illness and the way our world works. Here in America we are blessed with a medical system that can handle all our needs. We have an injury or illness, we make an appointment and go to the doctors. There is enough medicine and the right medicine.

Now, suddenly, there is chaos. The waters have been muddied! Our common assumptions about the way our world works are all in question. There are no more blind expectations that the systems we depend on will be there in our time of need.

There are questions from left and right. “How can there not be enough tests? We need ventilators! ICU beds! We’re running out of masks!” There is chaos.

With each passing day, people are out of work. More fall ill, the constant media reinforces the anxiety and relentless questions.

Let’s take a step back in time. Small pox was first clearly documented in the 4th century CE. It spread to countries from exploration, trade and new civilizations. From China to Japan to Spain and the Caribbean it travelled. Small pox was deadly. Three in ten people died who contracted the disease.

What we know today as vaccinations didn’t begin until 1796. An English doctor, Edward Jenner did some experimentation with his milkmaid who had contracted cowpox. In 1801 Jenner published a treatise “On the Origin of the Vaccine Inoculation,” in which he summarized

his discoveries and expressed hope that “the annihilation of the smallpox, the most dreadful scourge of the human species, must be the final result of this practice.”

(<https://www.cdc.gov/smallpox/history/history.html>)

“Almost two centuries after Jenner published his hope that vaccination could annihilate smallpox, on May 8, 1980, the 33rd World Health Assembly officially declared the world free of this disease. Eradication of smallpox is considered the biggest achievement in international public health.” (<https://www.cdc.gov/smallpox/history/history.html>)

As God’s people, if we take the long view, we can look back and see that God’s created world, cannot be wrapped up neatly in a box. Jesus was trying to tell the people who knew the blind man just that! The world is stranger and more complex than you think!

Yet, God is the light of the world. The light no darkness can overcome. Jesus is a mud-maker.

But we keep hearing voices that say, “Someone or something must be to blame! This deadly virus! Someone or something has to be a scapegoat for our pain and suffering.”

It’s always easier to point a finger and judge than to accept the facts at face value. This is where we walk by faith and not by sight. We walk by faith and not by sight.

Remember God created life from chaos. First the darkness covered the face of the earth. Darkness. A monolithic emptiness and vacuum. A cavity of nothingness. Then God created light. Brightness to open up that dark void! There was light and God saw that it was good. And in Him, in Jesus was the light of the world. First there was mud and then out came the sun/Son.

In this time of Coronavirus, God is at work behind this chaos that we cannot control! God is still at work! Brothers and sisters in Christ, do not doubt for one minute that we are abandoned. God is busy making mud even now. We may feel like our lives have stopped. Nothing is normal and anxiety comes creeping higher every day, like a fever on a thermometer. Do not doubt! God is making mud in the middle of our chaos. Chaos doesn’t frighten God one bit.

So we look for the mud! The NBA players paid employees who lost work from March Madness. The children who played their instruments for a neighbor who hadn’t left her home in days. Family and friends singing outside a nursing home window to help celebrate a 100th Birthday! The medical personnel and state health department employees putting their lives at risk every day for our sake. God is making mud so that we see God’s light!

This is a spiritual opportunity for all of us to walk ever deeper in faith. To trust what God is up to even if we cannot see it. God is calling us to let go of our preconceived notions about what our world is ‘supposed’ to look like. Right now nothing looks the same. But that is exactly where God will help us see anew. God can heal old blind spots.

The blind man didn't understand the how and why of his new sight. But he had an experience of the living God. "He put mud on my eyes. I washed. Now I see!" This is a spiritual opportunity for us to experience the living God. Open the Bible. Read a chapter a day! Pray for friends, relatives and King of Glory members. Check on neighbors. Make mud and it will glorify God.

Amen.