

Who Sinned?

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

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Seeking: Lent 5: John 9:1-41

As [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." ³⁴They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

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

Who sinned? Because of the retribution principle in the Old Testament, people associated physical illness with sin. Suffering was a punishment for not being in right relationship with God. Everyone in this text tries to figure out who Jesus is by blaming the blind man. No one sees him.

(Slide) Beloved of God, grace and peace be with you this day. Amen.

In two short verses, we hear that Jesus changes a man's whole life by healing his blindness. "Jesus 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."

But the underlying challenge of the story is framed up immediately by the disciples who see this blind man and say to the Lord, “Who sinned? This man or his parents since he was born blind?”

It’s a logical question for the disciples to ask. The theology they were brought up with goes all the way back to the Hebrew scriptures...the Old Testament as you and I call it. Contained in the Old Testament is what is called the retribution principle. The retribution principle is this: the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer. Righteous people who are living correctly and have the proper relationship with God will flourish and those who sin will suffer. Furthermore, this theology named the consequences in proportion to the behavior. If one was more sinful, the more suffering one would go through.

Therefore, it was normal for the disciples to ask Jesus the question. “Who sinned? This man or his parents since he was born blind.”

You and I might live in a theological culture not too dissimilar from the people of ancient times. How many times have you heard someone say: “God must be punishing me.” “If only I had more faith, then this wouldn’t be happening.” “You need to pray harder.”

True story: a man had cancer and it was getting worse. He joined several Bible studies. He had friends come to the house and pray for him in healing sessions. Multiple times. At the funeral his wife said, “I don’t understand. Why didn’t God save him?”

Bible studies are great! Prayer and prayer for healing is so important. And...we all have to be on the lookout for theologies that make us *believe more in our own powers than God’s*.

Which is the trap everyone else in this story gets caught up in. The Pharisees refuse to believe the explanation of one who they think is below them. It is their own doctrine, their beliefs that now make them blind. (Slide) Look at their pointing fingers. They want black and white. They want simple answers. They want to accuse.

“This Jesus man is surely a sinner. He heals on the Sabbath, that’s against the Law. Why are you defending him? Are you wanting to become his disciple?”

When we don't know what we don't know, we get threatened. We don't understand. We feel powerless. Vulnerable. Weak. It's so much easier to have black and white, right and wrong than a previously blind man telling us that now he sees.

All of the folks arguing with the previously blind man about Jesus' identity, can't really see the man standing in front of them. They can't see *him*. What if they had asked questions like, "How do you feel?" "What is it like?" (Rev. Garrity Seeking devotion. Pg 36)

Instead, their accusations about Jesus and himself, put him on the defensive until he gets fed up and says, “Here is a funny thing...Never 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.” ³⁴They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” They reviled him and drove him out. They reviled him. Seen any news stories recently where people are reviled? Oh, those Pharisees have so much fear and anxiety.

Put him in a box and objectify him. That'll work. Sure.

We know people are poor because
 incarcerated because
 mentally ill because
 people of color are.....because (Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow. Seeking
 devotional. Pg 32)

We know, we know, we know. Blind. Blind. Blind

In our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we have huge gatherings for youth. They have a really descriptive name: Youth Gatherings. But the week before the gatherings, other youth come. They are the *DAYLE: Definitely Abled Youth Leadership Event. This conference is for young Lutherans living with physical and cognitive disabilities.

Amanda Gipson, from Christ Lutheran Church in Cunningham, Pennsylvania, said, "It was nice to come and meet people who understood that 'the door's not wide enough' or 'the sidewalk's bumpy.' They got it."

The Rev. Walter Hermanns, Emmaus Lutheran Church, Racine, Wisconsin, is one of those adults (teaching leadership during the week). He lives with multiple

sclerosis. Hermanns led a workshop on what it means to be a Lutheran Christian. The church is growing in its understanding of people with disabilities, he said. "The church is people with disabilities as well as people who are 'temporarily abled,'" he said. (https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/6518?_ga=2.137319024.1934423207.1679174202-811959711.1669490058)

Now isn't that a lovely thing...the church is people with disabilities as well as people who are 'temporarily abled'? Dear church may we always repent of our theologies and doctrines and behaviors which exclude or make any of God's children feel less than.

This poem is named Jesus in the psych ward. Close your eyes and imagine.

He's in group therapy, plastic chairs in a circle.
Paper cups with weak coffee. Everyone in the room has seeking eyes.
The Pharisees admitted him. They said things like,
He's more than we can handle. They let the rumors fly.
The other patients like him. They say, He listens to me.
He calls them by name.
And when one of them asks,
Is this our fault? Are we here because we sinned?
Jesus does not wait for the facilitator to speak.
He crosses the circle. He kneels down. He grabs their hands
in his and says,
Child of the covenant, God loves you too much to ever wish you pain.
Bodies and minds crumble sometimes, but God's love for you does not.
And after that
there were happy tears and the group was dismissed to lunch,
where they broke bread and no one talked of sin.

1 Inspired by the poem, Jesus at the Gay Bar, by Jay Hulmes. Published in The Backwater Sermons. (Canterbury Press, 2021). Written by Rev. Sarah Speed. Sanctifiedart.org

*Name now changed to tAble