

John 9:1-41 Lent 4A 2020

As we begin our journey of social isolation, we may be wondering: who caused this coronavirus that is affecting our lives in so many ways? Or, whose fault is it? Did God cause it?

Today we have a related question in our gospel reading. Whose fault was it that this man was born blind? It couldn't have been punishment for his own sins, because he was just being born. Some people believe in reincarnation, where past sins affect how you are born the next time. As Christians, we don't believe that.

But 2,000 years ago, as now, the human tendency is to want to assign cause to affect. We want to understand why things happen, so we can change what we do and prevent the bad stuff. We want to control our lives. Jewish wisdom of Jesus' time, as given by those Pharisees, said that when bad stuff happened through no fault of one's own, such as this man who was born blind, then it must be the fault of the sins of his parents.

Jesus said that we cannot be punished because of the sins of our parents – but the tendency to try to understand 'why' remains.

It would be much easier for us if all suffering had a direct cause that we could easily see and assign the blame. It is true that in some cases we can point to a choice that makes all the difference, just as in the fact that one billion people will die this century because of a choice to use tobacco. Other suffering we know is caused by things far beyond our direct control, but we can still see a cause. We must not stop trying to understand how the bad stuff can be a result of our actions. Therefore – social isolation!

Yet, today in our situation, perhaps we are looking to God. What do we know for sure? Not much, except one thing. God is here. We are not alone.

I do think a lot about what God is showing us now. God is always showing something of Godself to us in every circumstance of life. I hate the word "test" and will never use it, but I do believe God provides us with opportunities to grow.

This is an opportunity to check in on our faith. Do we put our “whole trust in God’s grace and love” as we profess in our baptismal covenant? Do we believe that God is in everything and that God is all good? Do we believe that all will be well?

The only reality we have is the present moment. That is where God our shepherd is. The past is over and so why waste any time or energy blaming. We can’t rewind. All we can do is learn and grow from our accomplishments and mistakes. And the future is yet to be determined. Why worry about something that may or may not happen?

The challenge is not to find who to blame, but how do we reach out to those who suffer and bring hope and comfort to their lives. Dark and light. Let us use our thoughts and our energy to be a light to this world. There are many people who are not only infected by the virus but affected by it. People alone, feeling lonely and worried. So much senseless suffering, in God’s creation. So much darkness. Hold them in prayer. The light of God is in our connection.

This week’s Gospel reading echoes with darkness and light. Jesus gives a blind man sight. Questions are unnecessary. ‘How’ isn’t quite the point. There was dark, and now there is light. ‘One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’

Still, those around him want to know how and why, so they keep asking questions. But what more can he say? He was blind. Jesus gave him his sight and now, for the first time, he can see. He can give no other answer, and yet they keep asking. He is content to trust – without understanding.

There is so much contained in the arguing here. The healed and the witnesses. The doubters and the worriers. Tradition and threat, Sabbath rest and holy healing. Identity and history. Also, we find all our worries, our concerns and our reasoning as we try to make sense of wonder and grace, and, all our fear. At the center, Jesus as the light of the world. Again and again, John shows us Jesus as the light in the darkness, the light calling forth life. Light is a comfort and a calling for all who know darkness.

From Psalm 23: ‘Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for thou art with me.’ Jesus the shepherd knows there will be dark valleys, and is with us to light the way, as we journey through them. That is the perspective of the psalmist, and that is the

good news from John's perspective. Jesus is the light. Light brings forth life. John 1:3-5: What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow thee all the days of thy life.' Experience may tell us that darkness and pain as well as goodness and mercy seem to follow us. You know, the Hebrew word translated 'follow' may also be translated 'pursue.' So, then, the goodness and mercy of Christ pursues us – chases after us – all the days of our lives.

'I was blind, but now I see.' Let's claim once again the image of light for Lent. The Risen Christ is the dawn, the dayspring, giving sight to the blind, calling us to wake up into new life. Christ is the dawn that calls us away from the darkness of loneliness and isolation. The dawn that brings us into new beginnings. In these Lenten days, in these days of social isolation, let's remember that God is always with us, Christ's arms are always around us, no matter what our life journey brings. May we reach out to one another. I pray we may all see with the eyes of Christ.