

## Lent 4 / March 19, 2023

### John 9:39

*“Jesus said, ‘For judgement I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.’”*

There is a saying, “There are none so blind as those who will not see.” Our gospel this morning contrasts physical and spiritual blindness. Jesus encounters a man blind from birth, heals his eyes so for the first time in his life he sees the light of day and the world around him. The religious leaders respond with outrage. They take offense that Jesus gave this healing and did work by making mud, on the Sabbath. Despite this amazing sign, they say, “*This man is not from God, for He does not keep the Sabbath.*” They question the man whom Jesus healed and although he was not trained in the scriptures, even he recognizes that “*if this man were not from God, He could do nothing.*” There are none so blind as they who will not see.

On the other hand, there is a man who never saw the light of day and the world around him because of a birth defect, who now sees. Imagine what it would have been like for him the first time to see the light of day and the world around him. Can you imagine a person whose eyes were opened refusing to see and blinding him or herself again? Nevertheless, people like the religious leaders of Judea closed their eyes and refused to see Jesus as their God and Saviour when He revealed Himself through word and wonder. Jesus comes to us through the word that we might see. Through the law, He opens our eyes to see our sins. Through the gospel, He opens our eyes to see and receive Him as our God and Saviour.

The disciples ask Jesus about the man who was blind from birth. They assume this disability is a punishment for sin. They ask, whether it was the sin of the man himself or his parents that caused him to be born this way. We all wonder why bad things happen to us and to other people. We wonder if afflictions are divine retribution for particular sins, or are the consequence of a communal or generational sin. In a general sense, all suffering and affliction are the consequence of sin, the sin of our original ancestors. The sin of our first parents broke the human relationship with God and brought suffering, affliction, and death to all their descendants. It was not the sin of this man’s parents that caused him to be born this way, it was the sin of our first parents. Some suffering comes because of the sinful actions of others. Some sufferings come because of our own actions. Suffering in the general sense is a consequence of sin and God’s judgement on the world’s sin. However, suffering is not always or even often God’s judgement on a particular person for a specific sin. To assume that suffering, disability, or disease is God’s judgement on a person for a particular sin is a false assumption. However, it is an assumption we easily make!

Divine punishment for particular sins in the bible is always preceded by a prophetic message from God to the persons involved. God warned Israel through the prophets that if they worshipped false gods, oppressed the poor, denied justice to the widowed and orphaned, there would be consequences. On the other hand, Job suffered the death of his children, the loss of his possessions and the ruin of his health. God gave Job no insight into the reason for his losses. However, his friends assumed this was because of his children’s sin and his own sin. It was a false assumption. In the end the Lord chastised them for not speaking of Him what was right.

The disciples also assumed someone sinned in the case of the man who was blind from birth. It too was a false assumption. In both instances, the afflictions came through no fault of the persons involved. They were not divine judgements for personal, communal, or generational sins. They were a consequence of sin in general. They were for the glory of God, because He made His presence known and revealed His glory in their sufferings. In our gospel, the man’s affliction was the occasion through which Jesus revealed His glory as our God and Saviour. By giving sight to this man blind from birth, He opens our eyes, spiritually blind from birth, to see and believe in Him as our God and Saviour.

The man in our gospel did not suffer blindness because of his or his parent’s sin. He suffered because he was conceived and born into a world broken in relationship with God through sin. In this world through no fault of their own, some people are born blind or otherwise afflicted from birth. Bad things happen to all of us, conceived and born into this world broken by sin. Sometimes they come because of our fault. Sometimes they come because of the fault of others. Sometimes they come simply because that is the way of the world. No matter how they come, all bad things happen because the world is broken in its relationship with God. They reveal our sin, the world’s sin, and God’s judgement on sin. They are for the glory of God, because they open our eyes to see our need for Jesus as our God and Saviour. The afflictions of sin are for the glory of God, because in them we receive forgiveness, the Holy Spirit to help us bear our crosses and the promise of perfect healing in eternity. Suffering

and affliction show God's judgement on sin. The cross shows us God's mercy and His holy cure in Christ our Saviour.

The good news of the gospel is that Christ has suffered the judgement for the world's sin on His cross. God lifts the condemnation of sin from the heads of those who see Jesus as Saviour. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world. The world is already under the judgement of sin and the condemnation of death. God sent His Son to suffer the judgement for sin through His suffering and death, so that all who receive Him through faith and believe in His name, would be released from the judgement of sin, and set free from the condemnation of eternal death.

In Christ, God comes to us in our sins, in the world's sins and in the sins of others, so that He might open our eyes to see Him as our Saviour. This man's affliction glorified God, because through his healing, Jesus showed Himself to be His and our God and Saviour. Jesus opened his eyes to see the physical world, so that the eyes of his spirit would be opened to see something more glorious, Jesus His God and Saviour. On another occasion Jesus said to His disciples, "*Blessed are your eyes, for they see.*" He was not talking about the light of day or the world around us. He was talking about Himself. There is nothing more beautiful to behold and more important to see than Jesus, our God and Saviour.

Imagine how amazing it must have been for the man in our gospel to see the world around him and the light of day for the first time. I remember how sharp, crisp, and clear everything looked the first time I wore glasses. What this man experienced was more incredible, because he had never seen the world before. But the most glorious thing he saw was Jesus His God and Saviour. He confessed, "*Lord, I believe.*" He bowed down and worshipped Him. Jesus often prefaced spiritual healing with physical healing. In our eyes the physical is more important than the physical, but it is the Spirit that gives life to the body. The primary healing is of the spirit in relationship with God. Jesus gives us that healing and so the most important sight is to see Jesus as our God and Saviour.

The opening of this man's eyes was the means by which Jesus opened the eyes of His soul to see Him as the Son of Man and receive Him as the Saviour of the world. The irony of this gospel is that those who saw Jesus with eyes of flesh, refused to see Him with the sight of their souls. The one who was blind in his eyes saw best, because with the eyes of His soul he saw Jesus the Saviour of the world. There are none so blind as those who will not see. There are none who see so well and are so blessed as those who see Jesus as their God and Saviour. God bless us with faith to see Jesus as our God and Saviour, until faith passes into sight and in His resurrection see Him with eyes restored to perfect sight. In His Name. Amen