

“Light in the dark”-Based on John 9:1-4- March 22, 2020

What purpose can this serve? Why is this happening? It might be the questions on your minds right now as you sit at home listening to this sermon.

They are the questions better left unasked in this time. God alone knows and we have to be satisfied with that. However, sometimes He does give us small glimpses as to why these times can come in His Word, and in those answers, we can find some hope.

For today, as you just heard, we find Jesus encountering a man who was born blind. It was an encounter that led Jesus’ disciples to ask a question too.

They asked Jesus, **“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?”** They desired an answer to what caused this man’s plight, and they thought the answer was simple. He or his parents had done something to deserve it. You see, what they had been taught by their Jewish teachers was illness and calamity could only be explained by God punishing someone for their sins. It was the only way they could justify in their minds the unfairness of the situation.

But that is where Jesus reveals to us an important message for this time and for these questions, that calamity and illness isn’t always a punishment for sin, although it can be. Sometimes it can be for an entirely different reason altogether.

He says to his disciples, **“It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”**

Jesus redirects their focus from the question of why to the question of what. What results would God bring from this? The result would be Jesus showing He came to be the light of the world, but in more ways than one.

First off, He would show himself to be the light of the world by first healing the man and notice how he does it. Jesus spits on the ground, makes mud out of it, and puts it on the man’s eyes. Jesus perhaps does this so the man could feel the compassion behind Jesus’ touch.

He then tells him to wash and He came back seeing. It was perhaps Jesus doing this to show all of us the importance of another washing for our lives. The washing of holy baptism where we are claimed from the eternal blindness of our original sin and brought into the light of Christ and His salvation through God’s work there through the Word.

Just like Jesus would then show himself to be the light of the world in a second way. He would give that man more than just physical sight. He would give him the gift that would save him eternally. The gift of faith.

It says later when all the crowds had left, Jesus asks this man, **“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”** The man answered, **“And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”** Jesus said to him, **“You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”** He said, **“Lord, I believe”, and he worshiped Jesus.**

The greater gift given this man was the light of salvation that became his when He was led to faith in Christ. It was that saving work of God that may not have happened if this man had not been born blind and then healed by Jesus. God used the man’s blindness, a result of our

fallen world, and turned it into an opportunity for Jesus to show mercy and show us again who He is. Our Savior. Jesus turned something extremely bad into something very good.

So what about our time and situation. Some may look at this time, like Jesus's disciples and wonder whether it was something we did to deserve this, as if this is a punishment for sin. The answer is it could be. God has done it in the past.

The word pestilence or plague is first used in the Bible in reference to what God threatened and brought on Pharaoh and Egypt when Pharaoh disregarded His Word. It was what God threatened on his people Israel when they refused to go into the Promised Land at first and did not trust Him. It is what God told the nation of Israel through Moses would happen to them if they turned to other gods and spurned his commandments.

It was what God threatened against his people through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Amos and others. Sometimes the answer for why these things come is God sending a message through them. They are a punishment for sin, meant to bring us to repentance and faith.

This may be part of the answer. We don't know. We know today many have abandoned the Christian faith and the practice of worshipping him. We know there are many today living with no regard for His Word or Him as God, however what is also important to understand from God's Word is that is not always the explanation, like Jesus taught his disciples in reference to the blind man.

Job went through his terrible time, inflicted with sores, but not because he had sinned or was being punished for something, but because Satan was trying to turn him from God. Satan was behind it, but God gave Job the strength of faith to withstand the attack in the end.

Many very faithful Biblical figures went through very difficult times, but not because of specific sins, but because it fit God's greater purpose to save his people. Think of Joseph. Think of Paul and the early church, which went through some very trying days, but it led to the Gospel being proclaimed and the church growing. It is sometimes in the times that seem most dark that Christ's light can shine the brightest.

I was reading an article the other day from a news agency called "Foreign Policy". It talked about how through the centuries when plagues occurred it was Christ's church, moved by Christ's mercy and call for love of neighbor that stepped up and cared for the sick at the risk of their lives and it led to growth in the church.

He writes, **"Historians have suggested that the terrible Antonine Plague of the 2nd century, which might have killed off a quarter of the Roman Empire, led to the spread of Christianity, as Christians cared for the sick and offered a spiritual model whereby plagues were not the work of angry and capricious deities but the product of a broken Creation in revolt against a loving God."**

Many during the plagues that occurred in Martin Luther's day became attracted to our Lutheran faith because of how Martin Luther and others cared for their people.

It is like several years ago I was riding with a funeral home director to a cemetery and he asked me on the way an interesting question. He said, "I get to talk with a lot of pastor's in my

profession and a lot of them are singing the blues today, what about you? “Well, I said, the Lord has a way of bringing Reformations in His time and I trust in that.”

We have seen it in our country before. Think about a time in our country that we consider great. Often times, people think of the fifties, although to be clear, it wasn't great for everyone. But why do we often think of that time with nostalgia?

It is because the terrible times before it of the Great Depression and World War II refocused our nation. The nation came together in special ways to support each other and care for one another through those tough days. It brought people back to church as I know it was a time of growth in our Lutheran Church and I have read numbers where 50% to 60% of our nation attended church somewhat regularly in those days.

Values and lessons were learned from those times, which I bet were instilled in some of you. When I was growing up, I had a babysitter who would only let me use 4 sheets of toilet paper. I thought it was oppressive, yet she grew up in a time when you valued everything you had and conserved for a time of need.

I remember growing up my mom would can vegetables from her garden. Something she learned from her mom. It was the things you did to save for a rainy day.

I remember a member at my church in Iowa who told about how when she was growing up her mom saved up to buy her one nice dress from the department store downtown. She wore that dress to every important function and she treasured it because she knew her mom sacrificed for her to have it.

I know during those times there was a strong focus on family and taking time for each other and for God. Stores were closed on Sundays and the message “In God We Trust” was first put on our money in that time. God brought a reformation for our nation .

I just have to believe as your pastor that God has a purpose in this, to work his works in this time to bring people back to Him. I have to believe He wants to use us to be part of the solution, as we care for people in this time as Christ's church.

As in all things, God the Father's greatest desire is to point us to His Son and lead us to remember He is our light in dark times, like he was for that blind man. As Jesus said, “I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” No matter what happens in this situation in the weeks to come, we can know Christ is our light in these dark days and in that, we place our hope for better days ahead. Amen.