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John 9:1-41
Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 22, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, the gospel reading, highlighted by Jesus saying, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I mentioned early in this season that the Sundays in Lent include a more ‘thematic’ lectionary of readings than a ‘chronological’ progression through the Gospel accounts. Two Sundays ago, it was Jesus teaching Nicodemus about the entrance to heaven through the baptismal life. Last Sunday, it was Jesus teaching the Samaritan woman about the ‘spring of living waters’ that is faith in Christ and worship in the Spirit and truth. This morning, it is Jesus teaching about the work of God to bring life and sight to the blind, those lost in error’s darkness.

Consider that this text is 41 verses long, and that a mere 7 verses are about the actual miracle itself; and – of those – only two verses actually describe the miracle, as the first five give Jesus’ reasoning behind it. In other words, John’s account reminds us that, as with all other miracles, Jesus’ point is not to simply show His power, but to *teach* through the miracle – as if a visual aid – to teach

something about salvation from sin and all sin's consequences... in this case, that the Christ came to give sight to the spiritually blind, and to bring the judgment of eternal blindness upon those who assume they see.

Because the miracle takes only 7 verses, we will only briefly consider it: Jesus says, "This man has not sinned, neither his parents, but that the work of God might be displayed in him." In other words, Jesus says, "God knows why he allows these things to happen... he's in control, even over the consequences of sin." Blindness, coronavirus, crashing economy, anxiety, despair... in all these things, the limitations of man and the work of God becomes evident.

And, then, Jesus reminds us that – even the work that Christ himself does quite tangibly is still the will, and thus, work of the Almighty God who is Lord over creation and heavenly Father of His Church. Jesus says, "We must work the works of him who sent me"... Hear that? How can one cherish the love of Christ and, at the same time, doubt the will of the Father? The Christ does the Father's work. Their will is one; their love for you is one; their judgment of the world is one.

And Jesus spits on the ground and puts the saliva-glued mud into the man's eyes... and, (far from infecting him with coronavirus!), he infects him with new physical life – a life of physical sight.

But the pharisees realize that, for one to have authority over physical life (at least, *ultimate* authority over physical life), that one

must have authority over eternal life. In other words, the miracle is a visual aid that the One who performs the miracle is God Himself.

And when a skeptic is confronted with the plain and simple truth that the One he doubts is God himself, does not that skeptic begin to throw up every rational line of defense as to why the simple truth of God at work is not true! And those various lines of defense are almost *the rest of the text*, aren't they? Everything from:

“It's not the same man, just looks the same.”

to

“Well, it's the Sabbath. A real man of God wouldn't work – even if that work was a miracle – on the Sabbath!”

to

“Well, the parents can tell us that there's more to the story.”

(And, the leaders are rebuffed by the parents: “He's of age! Ask him yourself!”)

Now, when trying to explain away the work of God doesn't work, where do they turn next? They try to discredit the faithful. Isn't that how it always goes? – when the unbelieving world cannot rebuff the Word of God, it simply maligns those who believe in it and pressures them to renounce it.

The first effort to discredit: “Give glory to God, not a sinner.”

Now there's a deeper line of thought we'll get to in a minute, but the

surface level “pressure” is: “If you follow this man, you are disobeying God” ... as if Jesus’ will and gospel is different than the Father’s. Did Jesus not say at the text’s beginning that he was “doing the works of him who sent me?”

But the man-with-new-sight casts aside their pressuring, saying, “I’m not judging who this man *is*; I just know what He *did*.”

Now the second attempt to pressure: “Okay, how did he do it?” This one sort of sounds like skeptics of the Sacraments, doesn’t it? – which is a point that we shouldn’t pass by too quickly. In our text, Jesus describes this miracle as the result of him “working the works of God.” Are not the Sacraments the very same thing? Do we forget that? – that the Sacraments are very truly Jesus working the works of God among us! Works that do not give mere physical sight, but that give forgiveness and salvation and immortality beyond the grave! Yes, what an amazing thing to contemplate that God does His work among us and for our benefit. A work that is so beneficial, so needful, that – though we can abstain for a time for the sake of our neighbor’s bodily health, though we can miss it for a week or two in poor health (thanks be to God for His other means of grace, His Word and the Sacrament of Baptism, to keep us in this crisis) – do we not eventually find ourselves saying, “I need it. I hunger for it and thirst for it. I need the Sacrament of the Altar! For, there in that gift is the work of God! And, if the work of God, then life over death and light over darkness.”

And the world doubts, and thinks that the Sacraments are a “non-essential service” that needs to be sidelined while cannabis shops and abortion clinics remain open. And we say, “But it’s the work of God among us... a miracle better than giving sight to the blind or healing coronavirus!” And the skeptics scoff, “Well then, *how* did he do it? If you can’t explain it... if you can’t give it scientific definition... it is not reliable!” And the Lutheran rightly shrugs and says, “It’s a work of God. A mystery. How am I to explain it other than by pointing you to what he’s already promised and done?” Or, as the previously blind man says, “I already told you; are you asking again because you want to be his disciples?” Isn’t that how we ought respond, “Do you want to learn of and have a share of these mysteries, as well? Great! Glad to share these works of God with you!”

But the pressure of the cynics continue. Now, they’re on the defensive and feel the need to point to their own righteousness, their own status, their own position, and they say, “You’re *this man’s*, *this imposter’s* disciple. We’re disciples of *Moses!*”

And the man’s response is perfect: “This is better than Moses ever did!” Let us learn from this man how to respond to those who want to claim they follow a more certain name or hope. They might be “children of Abraham” or “children of the world” or “children of Science,” but *we* are children of God, and the work of him whom He has sent is better than anything ever achieved by Abraham, the

world, or science. Yes, even better than Moses, servant of God himself. Moses brought the Law; but grace and truth came through Christ Jesus.

And confronted with all this, the Jews can only fall back to the most basic, most petty argument: name-calling: “You’re a sinner, and you want to teach us?!” Implication?: “We’re not sinners; you’re the sinner.”

Now that brings us back to something I hinted at earlier, when I said “there’s a deeper line of thought” to when the Jews cried, “Give glory to God, not a sinner.” Have you noticed how often the question of whether one is a sinner comes up... the *charge* that one is a sinner comes up? Why would that be, in a text about blindness and sight; darkness and light? Why? Because sinners can do nothing about salvation. Sinners are stuck in blindness and in the darkness of death.

We confess that in doctrinal, textbook fashion at times in life. But, then, there are other times when we feel quite heavily, quite intimately the reality of what it means to be a sinner in trouble. Here we sit in our homes, blind to and paralyzed by an invisible invader... If we were holy and righteous, it would be no threat to us. We would see it plainly, bring it to the light, and overcome it easily... but we sit in relative darkness to this invader because we of ourselves are darkness and blind; and, as blind guides, we walk around town harming one another and infecting one another and we succumb so

easily to this mere consequence of sin. And, it's not just you and me personally; the economy of the strongest, proudest nation in the world's history is brought to its knees in five *days* – by a virus! Man's righteousness is shown to be wholly inadequate! Sinners all! Beggars all!

And, what may seem like a novel enemy is nothing new... doesn't sin's blindness harm us and each other with sin's consequences – not just in these past two months – but throughout all of daily life: justifying sin, encouraging self-made righteousness, rewriting and explaining away the Holy Law, infecting each other with views and stances and worries and doubts that annoy and with bad doctrine and a lack of Christian love that is all due to blindness. And if we harm each other with such temporary consequences, how much moreso to Sin itself! In the chapter of Lamentations I cited in my email to you on Friday, the lamenting sinner feels the weight of God's mighty hand that has plunged the sinner into darkness because of Sin itself.

And so, we need someone who is not a sinner, because only one who is not a sinner *sees everything*. Only one who is not a sinner has sight. Only one who is not a sinner, only one who is perfect, will not endanger, infect and destroy when ignoring “social distancing” and coming near to you in his body and blood. Only one who is not a sinner brings light and life to a world of darkness and death.

In defiance, Pharisees *claim* they have sight... but Jesus points out, if they had sight, they'd believe in *Him*. Isn't that sort of true for us, as well? That in every way we claim to have our own sight, guide our own path, project our own wisdom, we prove ourselves to be faithless and blind. But in every way we claim to depend on His sight, His guidance, His wisdom, His salvation, we are beneficiaries of His sight. For He alone has that divine sight that leads us through this world of blindness. He alone is that divine light that lightens our darkness and brings light to the world, a light by which we can see the broken world for what it is, see His sacrifice upon the cross for the glory that it is, and – defined by that – see our temporal life (and all temporal problems!) for what it is, see our eternal life already having been born in baptismal waters. In Christ, we see truly. Yes, at the beginning of our text, Jesus gives the blind man physical sight. But it's at the text's end that He gives him *true* sight, eternal sight, sight to hope in and lay eyes upon and trust in and confess his Messiah and Lord.

You – despite all the burdens and darkness of sin and sin's consequences – you have the benefits of that same sight. For that sight is not your own, it's a gift of God. It's not *your* sight... it's the gift of faith that opens your eyes to Christ and – if you will – the true worldview as defined by Christ... and encourages you, "Come, let us fix our eyes on Christ Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."

Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome. And as long as Christ is in the world, He is the light of the world... that we may all live, not in the terrors of shadows and fears of uncertainty, but in the confidence of His light and truth.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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