

4th Sunday in Lent

John 9

Grace mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Our text is the Gospel from John 9.

In the name of Jesus.

It is amazing how our Lord always knows exactly what we need. Our Catechism encourages us to pray a few verses from Psalm 145 before every meal, “The eyes of all look to you O Lord and you give them their food at the proper time.” It is true that our Lord feeds us with “daily bread” so that our bodies are well and healthy and satisfied. This is a message we need to hear during a time when people are afraid for the condition of their bodies. But our LORD is not just concerned about whether or not we have enough food to eat and whether or not we are safe from the Coronavirus. Our Lord also cares for our souls.

The Gospel for today is the 9th chapter of the Gospel of John. That is a long reading and so we have a shortened version of it that we have read so far today. John 9 is an extended discussion that takes place between a man who was born blind but who was healed... Jesus restored his sight so that he was able to see... John 9 is an extended discussion between the formerly blind man and the Jews. And they were talking about Jesus – particularly, who he is and where he came from. The Jews did not believe that Jesus was from God. They rejected Jesus and therefore they rejected his ministry. Everything that Jesus did they treated with skepticism. On the other side of the conversation is this man whose sight was recovered. He did not know Jesus, but then Jesus healed him, Jesus gave to him his sight. And eventually the man believed in Jesus so that he could be saved, not just from his blindness, but so that he could be saved for all eternity.

Now, what makes this text so perfect for us today is that at the beginning of the text, in the first opening few verses, there is a discussion between Jesus and his disciples. The disciples see the man who is blind and they do what every one of us does... they looked at him in his misery and they decided that it must in some way have been his fault. We do this, don't we? Those of us who are not suffering look at those who are suffering and we think that they somehow deserve it. Think China, or Italy. Or New York. Or California. There are a lot of sick people there. They probably have done something to deserve it. IF they were more like Ohio then they wouldn't be suffering so terribly.

So the disciples looked at this blind man in judgment. He is suffering with blindness because it's his own fault. So they ask Jesus, “ Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” He's suffering. It must be somebody's fault.

But notice how our LORD answers:

Our Lord's answer helps us to set this whole entire discussion into its proper place and proper order. **"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."** Jesus tells us that this man was born blind *so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*

Remember a moment ago, we recalled that verse from Psalm 145 – "The eyes of all look to you O Lord and you give them their food at the proper time"? Today, our Lord has given to us exactly what we need and he has given it to us exactly as we need it.

All of a sudden, we have found ourselves in the middle of a time of great uncertainty. This Coronavirus epidemic has taken away our sense of security. People are nervous and uncertain about many, many things. Some of us are uncertain about our health. We have heard the reports of this flu bug on steroids and we have heard that it constitutes a threat, especially to people over the age of 60. And so we are worried for ourselves. We are worried for our parents or grandparents. Some of us are worried about our health.

Others of us are worried about our economy. We have seen the stock market lose 3 years of growth in a week. There is no end in sight. How far will it fall? How much will we lose? And what will be the impact of those losses? What will happen to our retirement? What will happen to all those plans we made based on the money we earned? What is going to happen and what are we going to do?

I will urge you to prudence. I will urge you to use good reason and good sense. Care for your health. Protect the health of those God has given to you to care for. And exercise good reason when it comes to your finances and managing the gifts God has given to you. Certainly we use good sense. This is all just an aside. This is not part of the sermon, this is just what I think is good advice. Take it or leave it.

But (and now back to the preaching from the Scriptures) "the eyes of all look to you O Lord and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing." God is good and he hasn't stopped being good. He hasn't stopped caring for us or providing for us.

So what is he doing? Why is all this going on?

Again, we want to do what the disciples did. We want to point fingers and blame somebody (like the Chinese... some people want to blame the president... others want to blame the news media... we all want to blame somebody) This is God's doing. And what is God doing?

I don't know. Only God knows. But here is what Jesus said.

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

The blind man was blind so that the works of God might be displayed. So that the works of God might be revealed and made known. So... *what are the works of God?*

Well, the easy answer is to point to the man's healing. He was blind. Jesus healed him of his blindness. The works of God are healing. But that's not quite it.

Think of it this way. Let's suppose I was going to have a party. And I wanted to invite you all over to my house. I was going to grill up some steaks and hamburgers and Julie was going to make some of her famous apple pie. And let's suppose many of you have never been to my house. So what I would do is I would have my daughters make a sign that they would put out in the front of the house. It would have something like “Schlueter Party” with a big colorful arrow pointing at the house. I am sure the girls would put streamers and ribbons and balloons and all kinds of stuff to make it eye catching.

So now, Jesus healed this man of blindness. And yes, his healing was in a sense related to the works of God that Jesus wanted to be revealed. But the healing was related to the works of God in the same way that the sign out in my front yard would be related to the party. They are both eye catching and attract your attention, but the whole point for either of them existing at all is to direct your attention, to get you to stop in your tracks and come to where the main event is going to be. The Schlueter Party sign directs you to come to the Schlueter home for a party. The healing of blindness directs you to come to Jesus in faith. To believe in his name. To receive from him not just healing and life for today, but healing and life for all eternity.

So what is Jesus, what is our LORD God doing with this Coronavirus? I don't know. But I know that it is related to the works of God. I know that it is related to Jesus wanting all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Or let me give to you straight from the mouth of Jesus. In John chapter 6, immediately after Jesus fed a whole crowd of more than 5000 people with only 5 loaves and 2 fish, they came looking for him, found him and they straight out asked him, “What are the works of God?” Do you know what Jesus said? **“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”**

So there you have it. The work of God is faith. The work of God that he wants to do in you is that you believe in him. All of these things that he is doing in your life and in your world at this

very moment all point to that one thing. He wants you to believe. He wants you to trust... *him*. There are all these other things that are right now balancing on a precipice and could easily tumble down into the abyss. And who knows, it might happen! But what do I know? The eyes of all look to you O Lord and you give them their food at the proper time? The Lord provides us with our daily bread.

But guess what, he also provides us with salvation.

At the end of our reading, Jesus searched out the man whom he had healed and he asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The formerly blind man said, “Who is he sir, that I may believe in him?” “You have seen him and it is he that is speaking to you.” The man said, “Lord I believe.” And he worshipped him.

May you do likewise.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. And now may the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.