

Lent 4
John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39

3/26/17
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IT WAS NOT THAT THIS MAN SINNED, OR HIS PARENTS, BUT THAT THE WORKS OF GOD MIGHT BE DISPLAYED IN HIM.

Why? Why? Why? You've asked that question. That's what the disciples ask Jesus in our lesson, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" There has to be a reason this man can't see, doesn't there? When bad things happen, it has to be somebody's fault.

The disciples introduce us to the dangerous pursuit of the unknown "why," as in "Why did this bad thing happen?" We poor sinners are always tempted to obsess over the "why." You're going to ask the question, because you want to know. You feel you have to know -- and have the right to know. You want the reason it happened and the reason for that is very simple -- you want somebody to blame. Or, to say it even clearer -- you want to be sure that you are not to blame.

Why did you get the flu on your dream vacation? Why did your spouse say, "I'm leaving"? Why did the drunk driver hit your car? Why did your doctor speak the word "cancer" to you? There seems to be no asking of the question "why," as when parents of a sick or disabled child ask themselves, "Why did this happen to my child? Was it something I – we – did?"

Why? There's nothing wrong with asking "why?" Read through the Psalms, and see how many times David asked "Why?" of God.

And, by the way, when the thorns of life prick you and it hurts, go ahead and blame God. Jesus did. Remember what He said when He was

nailed to the cross, dying in agony? “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46).

When we ask, “Why?”, sometimes, answers are available. We are not robots who cannot control our actions; we can learn and do better, at least on a civil level. We should make use of God’s gifts of science and medicine. It’s good for us to examine ourselves – as individuals and society – and learn from our mistakes in order to prevent the same problems from happening again.

Allow me to illustrate what I mean. If you don’t want skin cancer, watch your time in the sun, right? And if you do need to be in the sun, use sun screen and wear protective clothing.

Having said all of that, perhaps more often than not, the answers simply are beyond our human reason. This is especially true when the questions are about God’s wisdom and hidden will, as in “Why did He allow this happen? To me? Now?” We must always be on guard that we do not answer questions where God has not given us answers. That’s dangerous. And, here’s why.

Consider the hymn, “My faith looks” ... where? Satan loves it when you avert your gaze; when you focus on yourself, because you take your eyes off Jesus.

The root and cause of all sin is doubt. Do you remember the father of all lies’ first words to Eve? “Did God really say?” Satan is always working to make us doubt what God says.

On one side, God says that you are by nature sinful and unclean. Satan does not want you to believe that you are a sinner. On the other side, God says that He forgives your sins and remembers them no more. But, Satan wants you to remember your sin.

Either way, Satan wants you to despair of what God has said, so that you feel unloved, abandoned, even punished by God. Because when you do that, you are focused on yourself and not on Christ. Satan has a most excellent way of distracting you from Jesus.

Before we get to Jesus' answer, we need to look back at the disciples' question and ask a question of our own. The disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Our question is this: are the disciples looking for a Law answer or a Gospel answer?

They're looking for a Law answer. They're asking, "Who did what sin to make this man born blind?" Remember, the Law is all about what we do, and the Law is given to show us our sin. The disciples are asking a Law question and looking for a Law answer. But "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ," so Jesus is going to give them a GOSPEL answer (Jn 1:17).

He says, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." In other words, neither the man nor his parents did something sinful that specifically earned the curse of blindness. It's just one way that the curse of sin shows itself in a sinful world. Because we live in a world cursed by sin, BAD things happen, and bad things will happen to you. Paul says it this way in the 8th chapter of Romans, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now" (v. 22). Blindness, cancer, accidents, heartache, sorrow is the creation groaning in sin.

But, the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that Christ Jesus has come to redeem the world, to remove the curse of sin. To demonstrate this in a very concrete way, He spits on the ground and makes mud with the saliva. He anoints the man's eyes with the mud and tells him to wash it off in the

pool of Siloam. When the man does so, he can see. He can see with his own eyes, and he can also see with the eyes of faith that Jesus is a promised Savior.

That's Jesus' answer to the disciples' question. Don't spend time tracking down WHY the man was born blind, because you're not going to find the answer. Instead, acknowledge that such things happen because of sin -- and rejoice that Jesus has come to remove that curse of sin.

That's Jesus' answer to you when you're faced with the troubling "why" questions. Don't torture yourself searching for answers that you're not going to find; because you will make a god out of doubt, and it will destroy your faith. Instead, acknowledge that you are a sinner in a sinful world, that the wages of sin is death, that bad things are going to happen; and then, look to what is certain. Look to the cross, because you can be absolutely sure that Christ has become flesh and died on that cross to remove the curse of sin for you. He has risen to bring life and immortality to life. He has promised you that He will come again and take you to be with Him in heaven. For today, His grace is sufficient for you. And, He will treasure you as His instrument so that the works of God might be displayed in you.

God the Holy Spirit works faith in you in the new birth of your baptism, so that you walk by faith, and not by sight, especially under the cross. Consider the story of Job. He had everything – and then had everything taken away. How did Job respond? With these words, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25-26). Job knew, that even in His struggles, God was at work in him and his life, and that in heaven, God would wipe all the tears from his eyes.

So, it is with you, Dear Child of God. In doubt and unbelief, some, in their suffering, will see God as only distant, uncaring or angry. But, you walk by faith and see God at work in you. No, with our human reason, we will never understand why God works the way He does. But, we know His love, that love that sent Jesus into the world to save us, and we know God will deliver us, and as we bear the cross, we know God has not forsaken us.

Many questions in this life about suffering will remain unanswered. But the Lord makes this answer perfectly clear: He declares that He has come into this world of darkness to shine the light of His grace upon you. He has gone to the cross to die for your sin, and He is risen again to deliver you to everlasting life. Do not seek answers that He does not give, but instead cling to this truth that He makes clear above all others -- you are forgiven all of your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.