

“Here’s Mud In Yer Eye!”

March 19, 2023

Lent #4

Scripture: John 9:1-16, 13-16 and 35-38

As Jesus was leaving the Temple area, he came upon a man who had been blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus replied, "This fellow did nothing wrong, nor did his parents. Rather he was born blind so that God could display his work through him. 4 We must carry out the work of the one who sent me while its still daylight. Nighttime is coming and then no one will be able to get anything done. 5 So long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

6 With that he spat on the ground, made mud with his saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes. 7 Then Jesus told him, "Go, rinse off the mud in the pool of Siloam..." So he went and rinsed his eyes off and returned with his sight restored.

8 Then his neighbors and those who recognized him as being a beggar, began saying, "Isn't this the fellow who used to sit and beg?" 9 And some said, "Yes it's him." While others said, "Naw, its only someone who looks like him."

But he kept saying, "I am the man."

10 So they asked him, "Just how were your eyes opened?"

11 He answered, "Someone named Jesus made some mud, spread it on my eyes, and told me, 'Go to Siloam and rinse it off.' So I did and suddenly I could see..."

13 Then they took the man to the Pharisees, 14 because it was on the Sabbath when Jesus made mud, spread it on his eyes and restored his sight.

35 Jesus heard that the Pharisees had thrown him out of the Temple, so he went to look for him and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Adam?"

36 He replied, "And who is he, sir? Let me know so that I may believe in him and follow him."

37 Jesus said to him, "You've already seen him; he's speaking with you right now."

38 And the man said, "You are my master, I believe!"

Sermon

Now in my exhaustive research for this morning's message, my medical consultant assured me that a poultice of saliva and dirt is most certainly not the current standard of care for healing congenital blindness.

Whew, that's good to know and thank God for modern medicine and for what we know as the scientific method. This whole saliva and dirt method is fortunately only anecdotal but a powerful story of healing none-the-less.

Cathy also pointed out that the incidence of blindness among infants is rather high in poorer parts of our world due mostly to the lack of access to suitable health care. According to the World Health Organization, globally, at least 2.2 billion people have vision impairment, and in almost half of these cases (say, around 1 billion), this vision impairment could have been prevented.

But not unlike modern medical practices, Jesus' disciples see the need to first determine the cause of this man's affliction. Like Med students doing their rounds, in order to be able to prescribe the appropriate treatment they first need to make a diagnosis.

Now in the ancient Jewish world God was the source of both good and bad. If you were blessed with good things you were, of course, living right. But if you were afflicted with a severe disease, fell into debt or your crops were destroyed by weather or pests then, well, you must have sinned and so deserved God's punishment.

There was a very direct correlation between behavior and consequences - you literally "reaped what you sowed!"

So the disciples' question, "Who sinned?" would not have been uncommon.

A conundrum no doubt, since on the one hand, he was born blind, so wouldn't have really had time to sin prior to birth. But then, on the other hand to punish an innocent child for the deeds of his parents also seemed quite unfair!

But even though it would have been a popular theory in that day, that wasn't the only available explanation. As far back as the story of Job, (probably the oldest story in the Bible) they would have had known a counter argument. In that story, if you recall, Job, when confronted by his "friends" that his great calamity was surely caused by his own sin, Job countered with a rather long litany proving his own righteousness.

Of course, that might sound a bit self-serving, but remember that even God, in the intro to the story confirms that there was no one alive as righteous as Job, and so confidently let Satan test him anyway. Now we all know that bad things do happen to good people and vice-versa, which still is a dilemma for us even today.

Jesus, however seemed far more interested in outcomes, and so dispensed with the diagnosis and went directly to treatment. Jesus didn't forgive him so this isn't about sin but more about healing and how this healing restores an individual to the larger community.

It is also interesting that Jesus gave this guy a very specific prescription. So, which one was the effective ingredient; the saliva, the dirt or washing in the pool of Siloam (which was considered back then to have certain medicinal qualities)? But, perhaps it was something else?

I also wonder if the fact that Jesus stopped, took some time out of his busy day to touch the blind beggar, albeit with muddy hands, might have also had some healing power?

As a blind beggar he would have been an outcast in that society, a person to be pitied, an object lesson to discourage sinful behavior and the recipient of obligatory alms giving. By restoring his sight Jesus was restoring him to a much larger role in that society.

And by the way, if you read the whole story, much of which I had to exclude this morning due to its length, you'll also see just how difficult it was for even for his society to wrap their heads around how to do this.

Through both word and deed Jesus debunked the idea that God punishes us due to our mistakes, or that we are punished because of the sins of our parents, let alone as some thought as far back as seven generations.

Jesus claimed here to be the light of the world, so to be truly and fully human then we must walk in that light - be, in fact, the reflection of that light! Through acts of kindness, love, forgiveness and acceptance Jesus heals us! But he too can break the chains of sin and guilt that are often unfortunately passed on from generation to generation. Jesus can also break the chains that cause the next generation to suffer the results of prior generations' mistakes.

None of us are born a white supremacist, or a homophobe, a misogynist, or greedy, or selfish - those things are taught to each new generation. In the past 50 years or so we also have learned that trauma, unknowingly can also be passed down through the generations.

Yes, science tells us that trauma and stress produce chemicals that impact something called "epigenetic tags" that attach to our DNA. These tags decide if certain genes get activated or not. This means trauma impacts genes carried from one generation to the next!

Even if the person who suffered the original trauma died or their story was forgotten or silenced, the memory and feelings associated with the trauma can live on in future generations, encoded in their genes!

Again the good news is that through the light of Jesus, we can both see more clearly and then to practice more effectively the restorative healing our world desperately needs. True humanity can first actually see those around us who are outcast and hurting and then with empathy and compassion reach out.

All Jesus, really did was stop in the middle of what he was doing, took time (probably the biggest barrier for most of us) and engaged in a process that created a relationship. He was willing to get dirty, get into some of the muck of that guy's life.

Now we can be confident that intergenerational trauma, as well as so many other harmful chains like white supremacy, poverty, guilt, shame, and violence that has so devastated our world, can be broken. And when those chains are broken, we are set free to become who we really are – and the spark of God in our soul can shine brightly in the world!

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