

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Blessing or Blaming

How do we carry on God's work?

Scripture: John 9:1-12, 35-41

Rev. Steve Filyk

February 20, 2022

Opening Hymn: O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing (Azmon)

Choruses: 10,000 Reasons (Bless The Lord)

Closing Hymn: Be Thou My Vision (Slane)

AGM Sunday

Song after AGM: We are Marching

How do you respond

When you turn on the news
And see footage of children
With bandages around their heads?

How do you respond

When you read about yet
Another grim discovery of unmarked graves?

How do you respond

When you drive past a homeless person
laying out cardboard for a bed.

Most of us are sad.

Some of us are angry?
Many of us wonder:

Who is responsible for this brokenness?

At its best these questions

Express a concern for justice:
a recognition that there are victims and victimisers
And that people do need held accountable.

At its worst it is an attempt

To distance ourselves from those tragedies.
Laying blame is a way to wash our *own hands*
Of this mess. PAUSE

In today's Gospel reading

Jesus has just escaped being killed
For making extraordinary claims.

Namely his assertion of divinity:

"before Abraham was born, I am!"ⁱ

As walks along with his disciples,

His disciples spy a man who is
afflicted with congenital blindness: A man who was born blind.

They asked Jesus:

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents,
that he was born blind?”ⁱⁱ

To most of us this is a strange question...

And yet it is the same question

That we ask ourselves
whenever we are confronted with suffering.

Who is responsible?

Who is to blame?

We know that every action has consequences,
And that some actions leave tragic legacies.

Although we don't use the same language

Its not hard to understand their query
About whether that blind man or his parents
Had done something wrong.

[Modern people might ask:

Was his mom drinking when she was pregnant?
Was she taking any medication with side-effects?
Was the newborn getting proper nutrition?

Did they own a house near high voltage lines?]

Well how does Jesus respond to his disciples' questions?

[And maybe ours as well?]

What we heard in today's reading from the NIV

Is that Jesus rejects the options
They give him.

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus,

“but this happened
so that the works of God
might be displayed in him.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In the NIV's rendition Jesus

Refutes the disciples' assertion
That the blind man's condition had human origins.

In the NIV's rendition,

Jesus argues that the man's blindness
Was connected to God's greater purposes:
So that God's glory might be seen In the subsequent healing he received.

Now there are some of us
 Who might find this translation difficult.
 Most can agree that human suffering
 is a consequence of living in a broken world.

But that God would assign a lifetime of disability and suffering to an individual
 All to facilitate a subsequent display of God's power,
 Well that's a tough pill to swallow.

Does God need people to suffer to reveal God's glory?
 And what about those who have suffered
 And are still waiting for their healing?

For many of us the NIV's translation
 Is difficult to reconcile with our understanding
 Of a just and loving God.

It makes me curious how many scholars with disabilities
 Were on the Bible's editorial team.

The fact is, that because the original Greek has no punctuation,
 there are other legitimate ways to interpret this passage.

Just so you can see what I mean,
 I'll ask our AV crew to put on our screen
 The Mounce Reverse Interlinear version of this verse.

If you look at the red highlighting you'll note
 That there is no Greek that corresponds
 To those English words.

Those words 'it happened' are simply not in the original,
 They are added to makes the NIV's translation comprehensible.

With those words the translation proclaims,
 the man is born blind so that God's work might be revealed.

But there is another possibility...
 Jesus simply notes that neither the man nor his parents sinned.
 End of sentence. End of phrase.

God's work being manifest in the world
 is not connect to what is stated previously
 but to all that follows.

To our need to do the works
 God sent Jesus to do.

This is expressed more eloquently in Peterson's version,

The Message:

"There is no such cause-effect here.

Look instead for what God can do.

We need to be energetically at work for the One
who sent me here..."^{iv}

Today's reading gives us two options.

Either God caused the blindness

So God could showcase God's glory.

Or that the man's blindness is simply a given.

And that human need should drive

Us to do God's work.

It is interesting that while the latter interpretation

Rescues God's character

it doesn't make life for us any easier.

The second interpretation tells us that desperate situations

Are not times for theological reflection

but times for action.

When we see pictures of causalities in Ukraine,

It isn't time to lament the abuse of power.

It is time to act.

When we hear new stories of more graves

It isn't time to blame the Pope or John A.

It is time for us to be a blessing.

When we see an old lady setting out cardboard

For another night in the cold

It isn't time to curse our own government,

But to offer food or shelter or encouragement.

When Jesus saw the man in a desperate situation

He didn't pass on by

All the while talking about who to blame.

No, he stopped. He spoke to the man. He sent the man on a quest for healing.

And then he followed up with him.

He told him, what he told the angry crowds earlier:

That Jesus is worthy of worship.

May we follow in Jesus' footsteps. Amen.

ⁱ John 8:58

ⁱⁱ John 9:2 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ John 9:3 NIV

^{iv} John 9:4-5 MSG