

March 18 and 19, 2023
Why So Much Trouble?
John 9:1-7

Fourth in a Series of Sermons, “Questions of Lent”

As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, “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 Friends in Christ,

Last week we studied the story of the thirsty nation of Israel grumbling and complaining and quarreling with Moses and God about their lack of clean drinking water - the question, “Why Do We Quarrel? Two weeks ago, we explored the account of God asking Abram to pull up roots and move to a destination unknown. We imagined the questions of his wife and servants, “where are we going? Are we almost there? How much farther?” And three weeks ago, we studied the account of Adam and Eve falling into sin and then God’s first four recorded questions - Where are you? Who told you that you are naked? Have you eaten of the tree that I commanded you not to eat? To Eve - what is this you have done?

Along the way, we have identified a question God, in effect, has been asking in all three narratives and throughout human history, “Will you trust me?”

Today’s sermon theme started out to be “Why was this man born blind?” But in an effort to apply this text into our life together here and now, the theme has morphed into “Why So Much Trouble?” Job, who knew something about trouble, said it this way, *Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.* The Opening Sentences in the funeral liturgy in The Lutheran Hymnal quoted Psalm 90, *“The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty, yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.”*

Two answers to this question today - 1) The Theological Answer, and 2) The Practical Answer

The Theological answer to the question “why so much trouble” is that we would go looking for God. In our text for today, the disciples were perplexed about this beggar’s blindness. They wondered out loud - was his blindness his own

fault or that of his parents? On the one hand, many Old Testament rabbis had been teaching that the sins of parents are punished in their children, but one or more prophets like Ezekiel had taught that every individual must bear his own sin. And so it just didn't make sense to the disciples that it could be the blind man's specific sin, since he was born blind. And neither did it make sense that if God was a loving and gracious God, that he could allow such misery to be passed onto a son for his parent's iniquity.

Jesus answers *clearly none of the above, but that the works of God might be displayed in us. We must work the works of the Father who sent Jesus while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.*

The rest of this sermon is an attempt to unpack what Jesus means with this answer. Jesus would teach us this morning that when trials and tragedies strike our families, instead of looking to past behaviors as reasons for such trouble, we should look to the future to see how God could get glory as we endure and find our way through days of heartache.

To be sure, all human suffering is a result of our fall into sin, but that is only half the story in today's Gospel lesson. The other half is that the works of God could be displayed in us as we endure whatever God is asking us to endure. That God's strength might be displayed as we weak and frail mortals keep running into the arms of our God for refuge. That God's grace might be again and again found to be sufficient as we learn from trial and error all that God is wanting to teach us could be displayed for everyone to see. When Jesus teaches *that the works of God might be displayed in us*, the verb "should be manifest or displayed" implies that the works of God are often hidden from general view.

Which brings us back to the theological answer of why life is so full of trouble. To say it simply - God hides from us so that we come looking for him.

No doubt most of you have played the game "hide and seek." I remember that my cousins and I would often play "hide and seek" on the family farm. Outside in the darkness. While the adults remained doors playing cards and doing whatever adults do at family birthday parties. I was one of the younger cousins, and one night, I recall that I found a really great hiding place - I climbed up my favorite tree and waited. And waited. And waited some more. It was quiet, and so I went back to the house, only to find out that they had all quit playing hide and seek. Nobody bothered to come looking for me. No one bothered to tell me that they had all gone in to eat!

Luther had much to say about God hiding from us in the circumstances of life so that we would come looking for him. Isaiah in chapter 45 declares, **“Truly, you are a God who hides himself.”** In chapter 55, Isaiah urges, **“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.”**

A professor from St. Paul, MN, has this to say about why God might hide from us, *“One hides initially, of course, so as not to be found. Yet even in the game of hide-and-seek a child initially hides so as not to be found in one place, only later to reveal himself in the safe goal, with a cry, “Here I am.” The game would have no point if remaining forever unfound were its goal. God’s game of hide and seek is not far different, though the “game” is a matter of life and death. God hides so as not to be found where people seek him, and reveals himself where he is not sought.”*

Why so much trouble? The theological answer is so that God’s name would be hallowed and his kingdom would come as sinners by the millions would be seeking the Lord while there’s still time. That confused and lost folks all over the world would be calling on the name of the one true God while he is still near.

Dear friends in Christ, God hides so that we go looking for him. He does not promise to be found in money and all that money can buy, but rather in the preaching and the teaching and remembering and keeping of His Word. God does not promise to be found in the eating and the drinking and the being merry this world offers, but rather in the eating and the drinking local congregations would offer at the Holy Supper. God does not promise to be found in the comforts and the luxuries and the successes and the savings accounts and the pension plans and the good times a healthy economy offers, but rather in the benefits given to repentant sinners as we swim in our baptismal waters.

Or to say it another way, and we’re still speaking theologically here, God wants to be found ultimately in the suffering and in the death and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That’s why St. Paul resolved to know nothing among the early Christians than Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Theologically speaking, Jesus would teach us two truths in our text for today.

1. The physical healing of the blind man was secondary to his spiritual healing.
2. Instead of looking back and trying to explain why certain folks have longer lists of trouble than others of us, we do well to look forward to how God will be working everything for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes.

Which brings us to our second point today - The Practical answer to the question “why so much trouble” is that we would go looking for opportunities to serve one another.

I find it helpful to categorize human suffering in three ways - 1) that suffering we bring upon ourselves / reaping what we sow, 2) suffering other people cause in our lives, and 3) suffering that comes our way through no fault of our own or others - for examples the destruction of a hurricane or illnesses like cerebral palsy or blindness, etc.

No matter which category our troubles fit into, for Christians, there will be two sides of the coin.

On the one hand, tragedies will be shrouded in mystery. On the other hand, that every tragedy will be an opportunity for the grace and the mercy of God to be displayed in us.

On the one hand, suffering hurts and it destroys, but as soon as we see it through the lens of the cross, we find that it builds character. On the one hand, Satan’s agenda in every day of trouble will be to deceive and entice us away from our Savior, but on the other hand, our Lord’s agenda will be to teach us important truths and draw us closer. On the one hand, the forces of darkness will apparently be prevailing, but in fact, in every season of trouble, Jesus will be the light at the end of the tunnel. And every Christian congregation will have an opportunity to be like a city of lights set on a hill, attracting hurting and broken folks to Christ.

James writes it this way, **“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

Paul said it this way to the Ephesians, **“For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.**

This is the rhythm of Christianity. First we receive from God His good gifts, and then we go looking for folks hungry for those good gifts. Sunday after Sunday we bask and we revel in the light of God’s grace, and then we go looking for little corners of darkness where God has appointed us to let our lights shine. Day after day, we count our blessings which are too many to count, and then we go looking for folks feeling alone and uncared for.

Of course Christians don't have a corner on doing good works in the sight of people, but we do have a corner on doing good works in the sight of God. All kinds of folks both Christians and non-Christians are reaching out these days with hearts of compassion and deeds of mercy. But the people of God are compelled by the love of Christ, which makes our motivations different. We serve knowing that whatever we do for a neighbor in need, we are doing for Christ Himself, which makes the burden seem lighter.

One of the joys I've experienced here at Faith Lutheran is being in this building doing what I do, and seeing volunteers show up and do stuff. Kindly and joyful folks they are, showing up and cleaning our bathrooms or vacuuming our carpets or counting our money or taking care of our finances hanging banners or taking care of the sound system or doing yard work. None of them are looking for trouble. All of them are looking to be helpful. Period.

They cheerfulness is contagious, and it all started with Jesus Christ showing up in the flesh. Living the perfect life we could never begin to live, setting His face towards Jerusalem, and on a mission. It all started with our Savior seeking us out, on His knees praying his heart out in the Garden, beaten bloody by soldiers who wanted him to hurt, it all started with our Savior stooping down out of heaven and being crucified until he couldn't breathe anymore, there were no ventilators available for Him, no CPR would be performed on him there was no turning back for Him. Rather He did what He was sent to do. He came looking not for trouble, but for you and for me. It was for the joy of spending eternity face to face with us that allowed him to endure what he endured. That's why he kept going until he could declare it is finished, and then into the hands of his Father he could commit himself.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation full of redeemed, grateful, and cheerful folks. They have their bad days, their good days, and their really good days.

- On their bad days, they pretty much mind their own business and keep Good News to themselves.
- On their good days, they cry out for God's forgiveness, and as often as they do, the grace of God sweeps over their collective souls. On their really good days, their gratefulness to God for blessings received keeps spilling over into the lives of their neighbors. The works of God are displayed in them as they do the business of their Father during the day, knowing that the night time comes when no one can work. In Jesus' Name. Amen.