**John 9:1-7,13-17,34-39** March 19, 2017

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Lent 3

*John 9:1As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. 4As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”*

*6Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. 7“Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing…*

*13They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. 15Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.” 16Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?” So they were divided. 17Finally they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replied, “He is a prophet…”*

*34To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out. 35Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” 36“Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” 37Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” 38Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. 39Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Seeing through the Troubles**

What is the biggest question out there? “Who’s going to win March Madness?” Obviously not. A lot of people here don’t even know what March Madness is. “Who will win The Voice in 2017?” No. I would guess that a great many of us haven’t watched a single episode of that show, much less wondered how it is going to turn out.

Hmmm. Big Questions. The Information Age has so confused us with the trivial questions that we sometimes forget about the big questions. How is this for a big question: “Why do bad things happen?” It was the question Jesus’ disciples asked one day when they were out for a walk. They had walked by a blind beggar, and it got them thinking. He was a poor man from a poor family. He had the second strike against him of blindness and a third strike of being born blind in a time with no special schools for special needs, no food stamps, no government assistance. From his young childhood until the time they would finally lay his old, shriveled, none-too-healthy or clean body in a grave, he would beg. As surely as the sun set every evening, he would rise the next day to beg. Begging was the beginning, middle and end of his life. People sometimes wonder if the American dream is still alive. But I would say that even a crushed American dream smells rosy compared to that.

**The Reason for Troubles**

“Why do bad things happen?” This is such a big question, that we are still asking this question thousands of years after Jesus’ disciples asked it. And people will be asking it until the end of this world.

And so Jesus’ disciples, glad it wasn’t them sitting on the pavement with the hand out, asked Jesus the big question this way: ***“Rabbi, (Teacher), who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”***

It’s shocking that they apparently discussed this question within earshot of the man. Almost like they thought him a pet or a beast of burden, too dumb to understand. But it is recorded that Jewish rabbis of this time were known to approach suffering people, like this blind beggar, and ask them point blank, “What sin have you committed that this has happened to you?”! (Edersheim, *Life & Times of Jesus,* p.598) Imagine that. Imagine walking into a random hospital room down at Hardin Memorial and asking the patient, “So, what sin have you committed that this has happened to you?” Who would ever do that?

Yet one of the most common assumptions in the world is that bad things happen to people because of bad things they have done. Entire religions are founded on this belief. You have of basic principle of *karma* from Hinduism and Buddhism. *Karma* in the belief is that every good or bad thing in our life is because of the good or bad we have previously done. And like Hindu *karma,* the popular Jewish thought of the day was that bad things happened to bad people.

Jesus doesn’t so much to answer the “why” in the sense of the cause, but he answers the “why” in the sense of “for what purpose.” Apparently still within earshot of the blind man Jesus stated, ***“This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”*** It’s about something bigger than this man or parents. Jesus says it’s about God’s plan. In this way, God’s Word is very consistent in answering the question. It always points to the fact that God will use even troubles to accomplish what he wants.

But in another way God’s Word is not so straightforward. God explains that bad things happen for many different purposes. Here, God’s purpose was that this man could be healed and testimony given that Jesus is the Son of God.

But at other times, God has had other purposes.

Sometimes, the Bible states that God *did* bring bad things as punishment. And this cannot be ruled out in our day either. But it is also quite clear that when God brought “punishment” on people, it was to people who clearly knew God’s will, and continued to act contrary to it. I would always be very hesitant to call anything God’s punishment, because that is between God and that person. But it clearly can happen.

The Bible mentions other reasons for troubles. One of them is to refine, to purify a believer’s faith. Think of the accomplished athlete in training: burning lungs and sore legs. We are so constructed that if we do not undergo some sort of uncomfortable stretching and limited pain, we actually deteriorate. So too in our lives of faith. We become stronger and purer in our faith when our faith is exercised.

Sometimes troubles come into our lives to call us to repentance. We get selfish and our relationships begin to crumble. Listen and you will hear God calling you to repentance, to pay attention to the other people in your life.

Sometimes troubles come into our lives to *prevent* sin. Sometimes God must prunes us, cuts us back, to keep us from getting into sin.

God’s word explains many different reasons for the trouble in our lives. But notice that every single one of these reasons is a variation of Jesus’ theme, ***“This happened that the work of God might be displayed.”*** God’s allows troubles for a wide variety of reasons. But God does not do these things for arbitrary reasons; he has a plan and a purpose.

Which is easy for me to say. Reasonably healthy, with the last little bit of residual youth, enough money to pay the bills—sure it is easy for me to say this. It is easy for me to talk about how good God’s plan is for the troubles other people have. But I don’t speak my own words. Jesus speaks to you, as he did about this man, ***“This [has] happened so that the work of God might be displayed in [your] life.”*** God is working, he has always worked, he will always work in your life that his work might be displayed. He has a purpose for all of the troubles of life.

Here in John chapter 9, this man’s blindness served the purpose of helping this man and bringing glory to Jesus. ***“[Jesus] spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.”***

Can you imagine the joy? Remember the best day of your life. Your marriage? A child’s birth? The dream job? The full scholarship? Your retirement date? This man felt that and more. His blessing was not a blessing common to humanity. It was a blessing too big to even be asked. What joy for him, for others!

**More Troubles, More Blessings**

But not all were happy. Influential leaders had made up their minds about Jesus. They had decided that Jesus was a fraud and a threat. So as soon as they heard this blind man had been healed, they haul him in for a full inquiry. They will find a way to use this against Jesus, some technicality. They will grill this man, ignore his joy, plant their poison. Partisan politics are not something new to the 21st century!

So when this formerly blind man declared that Jesus was a prophet, they deal with him. Those authorities said to the blind man: ***“You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!’ And they threw him out.’”*** They have turned Jesus’ blessing of sight into a curse for this man.

Now you are thinking, “Mr. Blind Man, just shake your fist at the haters and tell them, ‘Who cares what you think!’” Easy to say. But he stood before an assembly of the most learned, the most influential men. They were wealthy; they were healthy. And when you are a poor, uneducated, unskilled man standing in begging rags before that assembly, and they insult you and tossed you out, it hurts. Add to that, that in the course of the hearing, his own parents had been called into court, and while they did not disown his son, they were not all that supportive of him either. And now he was excommunicated. The final step of Jewish excommunication meant that this man was no longer welcome in God’s house; people were not to talk to him, even to give him directions; nor give a decent burial (Eders, 602). This man had been given his sight, and now was roundly insulted, lost all his dignity, exiled from his community, and wondering even if his parents cared for him.

You know what? I think this blind beggar was better off before Jesus found him! The question about bad things happening started with the idea that his blindness was because of something bad he had done. Quite the opposite, this man now suffered specifically because he had done something good – he had acknowledged Jesus to be sent by God!

Yet God had a plan for even these pains and troubles. ***“Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and… found him.”*** Our precious Savior went and found him. He had a plan not only for that blindness that had afflicted him from birth. He also had a plan for all the abandonment and pain that now filled his heart.

The blind man’s sight had been a great blessing. And for his sight, he had acknowledged Jesus as a prophet. But that was not enough. These later troubles brought him to the greater treasure, the treasure of faith in Jesus as his Savior. Truly, God uses *all* things for his purposes.

***“[Jesus] found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ ‘Who is he, sir?’ the man asked. ‘Tell me so that I may believe in him.’ Jesus said, ‘You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.’ Then the man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him.”***

And so God uses the troubles of this life for a greater good – always!

**Troubles Bring Sight**

People often ask, “Why did God let these troubles happen?” And the worldly answers come back in one of two ways: Either God was unfair, or we were bad. Both wrong answers. The answer that Jesus gave to his disciples stands, ***“This happened so that the work of God might be displayed.”*** That is much more complex than the sort of answers we like. But it is the reality of an infinitely powerful and loving God.

It is easy to decry the child abuse, the terrorist bombing and the torture chamber. It is easy to ask God, “Why! Why do you let this happen?” Meanwhile even if we follow the big rules, we don’t follow the little ones. We don’t follow the speed limit. We don’t declare all our cash income. On paid work time we freely consult social media or news or entertainment. We look at things that we shouldn’t be looking at. We don’t clean our room. We don’t volunteer our time for community and church. And then we ask God, “Why do you let these troubles happen?” We want what we want *now*—and when billions of people all pursue their own selfish ends, should it be any surprise that it snowballs into troubles and tragedy? Maybe, just maybe, God really is working out all things so that even the selfish pursuits of planet full of sinful people still work to his glory and our good.

We know not what came of this man. Did he continue through life rich or poor? It does not matter because that was not the point of Jesus, nor the Gospel of John, nor of the Bible. God’s message is not about a trouble-free life. In fact, a trouble free life might just be the worst possible thing for us. But Jesus’ words and this man’s life are proof that God uses the troubles of life to bring us to the most important blessing of life: to encounter and believe on our only Savior *from* sin, our only Savior *for* eternal life, Jesus Christ.

What joy! Praise God that Jesus have given you the sight to see through the troubles. Amen.