

4th Sunday of Lent “Why?”

Fr. Frank Schuster

My friends, why do bad things happen to good people? Have any of us asked that question lately? We are all struggling with the impact Covid-19 is having on our community and world. We are all trying to figure it out. Why is this bad thing happening to us? It is not a new question right? It is a very old question, as we all know. Clearly this question was on the minds of the disciples at the beginning of the Gospel. The disciples ask Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” What a horrible question. Instead of having compassion on the man born blind, they want to assign blame so that they can somehow believe that they can avoid this infirmity.

Jesus does not offer them this comfort. Jesus says, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.” Notice how the disciples begin the story blind. Jesus is asking them to see God’s glory and love shine through this poor man’s infirmity. There is a fundamental message here that is an important takeaway from this Gospel reading: people with an illness or physical disability ought to be treated with the same love and respect as anyone else. Jesus makes this very clear when he restores sight to the man born blind. “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.”

Indeed, after Jesus gives sight to the man born blind, we see that Jesus’ gift of sight isn’t limited to the man’s eyes. The man also gains spiritual sight that grows as the story progresses. He begins by referring to his healer as “the man called Jesus”. His spiritual sight progresses when he refers to Jesus as “a prophet”. At the end of the story, his spiritual sight becomes crystal clear when he confesses Jesus to be “Lord”, a title reserved only for the Deity.

Meanwhile, as the man born blind grows in spiritual sight, notice how the religious leaders in the story become progressively spiritually blind. They do not take the man for his word, they bring in the man’s parents for questioning, and they can’t get past their bias that Jesus is, in their eyes, a sinner. The drama heats up as our hero’s spiritual sight becomes restored to the point where he becomes an evangelist. Just like the woman at the well last week, the story begins with this man alone and in isolation. After an encounter with the Lord, the man becomes an evangelist. The religious leaders, refusing to see the amazing grace at work in this man’s life, shut their eyes to the miracle that had taken place, denounced the man as a sinner, and threw him out of the synagogue. By the end of the story, an ironic reversal of fortune has taken place. The blind man sees and those who claim to see are actually spiritually blind.

My friends, just like the woman at the well last weekend, notice how the man born blind isn’t given a name. Whenever we find characters that are not given a name we are invited to see ourselves in that person for a moment. You see, the sight that is given to us at birth isn’t sufficient for seeing God. We need a different sight for that, the sight that comes from faith. Now, all of us have received a special gift of spiritual sight in baptism. Just as Jesus sent the man born blind to the waters of Siloam, we were sent to the waters of baptism. We are all now challenged to see the world differently because of God’s grace at work in our lives. And what

would happen if we saw the world around us with Jesus' eyes? I'll be the first to say, this is not easy these days.

We are all trying to see God's plan in this whole coronavirus outbreak. We are all asking ourselves the question: why is this happening to us right now? Is it because the world needed punishment? Is that it? Is it because we are sinners and God is chastising us? Could it be that? What if the answer to that question is the same answer Jesus gave to his disciples today: so that the glory of God could shine through us in this moment of history? What does that look like? And, if this is the case, what would that new vision require of me this coming week as a disciple of Jesus who has commanded us to love God and love our neighbor?