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“The End of the Blame Game”

Text: John 9:1-41 (Isaiah 42:14-21; Ephesians 5:8-14)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

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?”

On a certain level, that question is legitimate. For the only reason there is *any* disease or handicap in the world today is because of sin. And more specifically, it is because our parents - our first parents, Adam and Eve - sinned and with their sin plunged the world into sin. And all people ever since are born in sin and with sin.

But it can also be true in other ways. Sometimes it is our own actions - *sinful or not* - bring about problems and have consequences. If we stay out in the sun too long we can get skin cancer. Those who drink too much can have liver problems, and smoking often causes lung cancer or other breathing problems. Adultery causes marriages to fall apart. Yes, sometimes we can say that our own sins have caused our problems.

But not just that - sometimes it is the sins of the parents that do cause problems for their children. Babies are born with AIDS because of the promiscuity of their fathers. Mothers who use drugs while pregnant can cause their children to be born with handicaps. Babies are born addicted to drugs.

Yet while these things happen, we do not always know why they happen. Some mothers who abuse drugs have healthy babies, while other mothers who take great care during their pregnancies have babies born with problems or handicaps. Smoking doesn't always cause cancer. All these things happen because of sin in the world, but there's not always a direct cause and effect relationship. Sometimes we just don't know why things happen as they do.

But still we want to know! Maybe to assign **blame**. Perhaps to make ourselves feel better or feel superior. Isn't that why many are so fascinated when the sins of others are revealed on television or in the media? *How could they? What were they thinking? I would never . . .*

So what's the dirt here, Jesus? Who gets the blame?

But you know what? **Blame doesn't help**. It didn't help our first parents when Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent and they both blamed God! All blame did was

pit them against one another and against God. But it couldn't get them out of the mess they were in, the sin they were in, the death they were in. Us either. It doesn't do any good to tell the smoker dying of cancer or the mother mourning over her baby: *I told you so!*

So Jesus doesn't play that game. For while blame doesn't help, there is someone who can. Someone who came not to be against us but to be for us. And that someone is the one who came to that blind man that day.

And so Jesus says: ***"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."*** Or in other words, Jesus says, it was a set up!

This man is going to be used for something special. God is going to work in him and through him. His years of darkness are going to be replaced with the joy of light. And not just physical light, but the joy of seeing ***the light of the world***. The joy of seeing the Messiah. The one who has come to break the power of sin and death, for this man and for all people. Everyone could see the result of sin - Jesus wanted them to see Him and in Him, the cure and solution to sin.

Which is why I think Jesus heals this man as He does. Jesus could have just healed him with a word - He'd healed that way before. But instead, He creates, He *anoints*. He makes mud - breaking one of the Pharisees' man-made-but-elevated-to-God-status-rules about what counted as work on the Sabbath or not, and then sends the man to wash it off. It's almost as if Jesus does it this way on purpose, to get the attention of the Pharisees, that they too may see and have their own darkness broken and so Jesus be ***the light of the world*** for them too.

And it works . . . sort of. He *does* get their attention. There's an investigation. But they are torn, divided. He has to be a sinner, for He broke the Sabbath rules, but a sinner couldn't do this! It's almost as if they have to blame *somebody*, but they don't know who to blame. *Blame again*. So finally they blame him, this poor man who only knows that he used to be blind but can now see, and they ***cast him out*** of the synagogue, out of fellowship with them.

They are a living example of what the prophet Isaiah said: ***Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the Lord? He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear.*** Their rules, their religion, had blinded them and deafened them. They saw so much the sin and need in others that they became blind to the sin and need in themselves. They stared so long and hard at their own piety that they became blind to the good in others. They knew the words of their Bibles so much that they forgot what those words meant. And so when Jesus came along – the very fulfillment of those

Scriptures, and the One they should have been waiting for and excited to see – they were blind. They could not see what was standing right before their faces.

But it's not just them - *there's a warning for us here too*, lest we do the same thing and fall into the same trap. That we so see the sin and need in others that we're blind to the sin and need in ourselves. That we become so proud of our own piety that no one else can measure up. That we know the words of Scripture but forget what they mean. Or maybe the biggest and most popular one today: **that we seek only to blame and not to repent**. Stop it. Drop the pride, and humble yourself in repentance. For who's the sinner? Yes, you're the sinner!

So this man - talk about an up and down day! But Jesus isn't done with him yet. Hearing that those who should have helped him instead tossed him, **Jesus searches him out**. This man *couldn't* come to Jesus - he still hadn't seen Jesus; didn't know who Jesus was, what He looked like. So Jesus finds him. And He opens the man's eyes once again and enlightens His soul. The man sees Jesus, he sees His Saviour, and he believes and worships Him.

And so too now for you. Jesus comes for you too. For this is what Jesus told His disciples at the beginning of this account, when they first asked Him about this man. He went on to say: ***"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."***

There are two significant things there. First, He says **WE**, not I. **WE** must work the works of him who sent me. Jesus AND the disciples. And then He also says: ***as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.***

This is the good news for you and me! For even though Jesus is no longer walking on the earth in the flesh as He did that day with the blind man, He *is still* in the world - only now it is in His Word and Sacraments, and working through the ones that He sends. And through these He is still coming to people locked in sin, locked in darkness, locked in blame - to people like us! - and shining the light of His forgiveness and love.

And so He is still washing and giving spiritual eyes, now to those who are baptized. That we may not only see our sin and need, but more than that and more important than that, **see Him**. See Him as He wants to be seen - as your Saviour. As your sin- and blame-bearer, as your death-taker, on the cross. That in answer to the question: *Who's the sinner?* We say: *Yes, I'm the sinner, but my sin is on Him. And if it's on Him it's no longer on me. And if it's no longer on me, then I am forgiven. I am redeemed. I am set free.* And those are the words we continue to hear from Jesus today in the Absolution - you are forgiven, you are free - and to which we say in response, like the man-formerly-blind: *Amen! Or yes, **I believe.***

And believing, then, as St. Paul said, ***walk as children of light***. Walk no longer like men born blind and still blind, but as men born blind now able to see. Now enlightened by the light of Christ, by the light of the world. Walking no longer in the darkness of sin and indulging in those things we hope never come to light, which would shame both us and our Lord - *and then blaming others*. But doing and saying those things that ***are good and right and true; what is pleasing to the Lord***.

And chief among those things to do and say are what you have come here today to do and say: to repent and receive the gift of your Saviour's forgiveness; to repent and receive the gift of your Saviour's Body and Blood. For this is to see yourself rightly, and your Saviour rightly, and to speak rightly - no blame, just truth.

And then, thus forgiven and fed, enlightened and set free, you are strengthened and free to live this life for others, walking as children of light in a very dark world. A world which very much needs the light. As more and more sin arises and more and more darkness descends, and as more and more blame gets passed around, your word, your life, speaks something different. Another way, a right and true way. A way not of blame, but of a Saviour; of the one who came to overcome the darkness . . . and did.

And so whatever is happening now, whatever joy or sorrow, whatever trouble or trial, whatever triumph or tragedy, you live in the light of His promise: that as these could not overcome Him, so they will not overcome you. You have His promise of life, which is as true and sure as His empty tomb. For in Him, that is the future of your tomb as well.

So ask not: *Lord, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?* but ask instead: *Lord, who died, that this man and his parents may live? That I may live.* For that's the question and the answer that makes all the difference in the world.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.