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Lent 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Having Room for Jesus”  
Text: John 9:1-41 (Ephesians 5:8-14)

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

A man blind from birth. He’s the next one to walk, after the Pharisee and the Samaritan woman, not into a bar, but into Jesus. He’s the next one to have his thinking changed and his life turned upside down. The Pharisee, Nicodemus, learned about the gift of God. The Samaritan woman received a new and greater Bridegroom and His love. And this man today, born blind, receives his sight. And much more.

Like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, this man, too, had been schooled to think in a certain way. That because of some particular sin, some particularly heinous sin, some really, really bad sin committed by either him or his parents, this man deserved and received the wrath and punishment of God and so was born blind.

Imagine living your whole life thinking that. That God is punishing you. No mercy. No compassion. Just punishment. *For your whole life.*

But it wasn’t only the blind man who thought that way. Notice who asked Jesus that question: *His disciples*. It was how people thought. It was the common way of thinking. Blindness, deafness, leprosy, paralysis, some other disease . . . what did you do? Why is God punishing you?

But that wasn’t just how people thought then. It’s the way people think today as well. When something bad happens, when tragedy strikes, when you get bad news, what’s very often the first thought, the first words, out of someone’s mouth? *Why is God punishing me?*

That’s how we’ve been taught to think. If you do good you’ll be rewarded. If you do bad, you’ll be punished. So if something bad happens to you, you must have done something bad to deserve it. And if something good happens to you, you must have done something good to deserve that, as well. All very tidy. All very logical. We’ve got it all figured out.

But in such a system, there is no room for mercy, no room for compassion . . . *no room for Jesus.*

So Jesus wants to help us see things differently. To see not just according to the Law, but to see as He sees, and think as He thinks, and so maybe even act and He acts.

And so, He says, ***It was not that this man sinned, or his parents.*** Well, of course they did, for no one's perfect. This man and his parents sinned plenty, as do we. But it was no *particular* sin. There is no one-to-one correspondence.

Sometimes there is. Sometimes our sins cause bad things to happen - adultery causes marriages to fall apart, promiscuity can lead to disease, mothers who use drugs while pregnant can cause their children to be born with handicaps.

But not always. People who eat right and exercise can still get cancer. Mothers who take great care during pregnancy still have babies born with problems or handicaps. All this, we can say, is a result of sin - but not sin in a *micro* sense: this sin, that consequence; but because of sin in a *macro* sense: because there is sin in the world and sin in us, these things happen.

So while sometimes we may know why things happen, often times we don't. But today Jesus gives a whole new reason, an additional reason, for why these things might happen; a new way of thinking: that sometimes these things happen because He wants to use them for His glory. **And if for His glory, then for our good.**

So for this man, He was born blind *that the works of God might be displayed in him.* That in healing him, Jesus be not just *the light of the world*, but the light for him. Light in his eyes. Light in his mind. Light in his heart. Light in all his life. And light for all who witnessed what happened that day, and even for us who would hear about it later. That we might know Him as gift-giver, sight giver, and life giver.

Though not all want these gifts or even see them as gifts. A controversy breaks out. And this man gets to see something else - the ugly side of sinful men. Accusing eyes. Faces twisted into anger. Fists clenched in rage. Tongues lashing. And then he is thrown out of the synagogue. When he was blind he was welcome, but now that he can see, he is not. *How can that be?* They called the man who healed him a sinner. *But how could he be*, if he healed a man born blind? Could *they* be the real blind ones? Not able to see who is standing right before their eyes?

Now realize, the blind man hadn't yet seen Jesus. For Jesus had anointed his eyes with mud and told him to go and wash. . . . And when he came back to the crowd, the throng of people, *who had done it?* He didn't know. But then he heard the voice. The voice that had spoken to him. The voice of the one who had healed him. Living so long without his eyes had made his sense of hearing very good.

***Do you believe in the Son of Man?*** Jesus asked him. He wanted to. ***Who is he?*** he asked.

***You have seen him . . . now there's a line the blind man never thought he would ever hear! You have seen him and it is he who is speaking to you,*** Jesus replied. And this man, who just a short time ago had never seen *anything*, now saw his Saviour. And he fell down ***and worshiped Him.***

Like the Samaritan woman last week, we don't hear any more about this man. But I wonder if this man who was healed in Jerusalem, might also have been in Jerusalem a short time later . . . and saw Jesus again . . . this time, not *standing* before him, but now *hanging* before him. On a cross. They said He was a sinner, and now they got Him executed as one. And I wonder if he wished his eyes had never been healed . . . had never seen *that*.

But seeing *that* made the news that spread like wildfire through Jerusalem three days later that much sweeter. News that Jesus' tomb was empty. Rumors that He was alive; that He had risen from the dead. St. Paul tells us in Corinthians that after Jesus rose from the dead, He *appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time* (1 Cor 15:6). How cool would it be if this blind man was one of them . . . Or maybe the blind man never did get to see Jesus alive again. Perhaps - ironically! - he remained one of those who, as Jesus told Thomas that night of His resurrection: *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed* (John 20:29).

But either way, blessed was He. And blessed are you. For his story really is your story. You were born blind spiritually, but Jesus anointed you and washed you in the waters of Holy Baptism and gave you eyes to see Him by faith, to know Him as your Saviour, and to worship Him. Or as Paul put it when he wrote to the Ephesians: ***at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.***

Yet like this blind man, perhaps now that we can see, we don't like what we see. The sin and evil in the world. The sin and evil in us. That how often we do not ***walk as the children of light*** we are, but still indulge in those things we hope never come to light, but we know God sees anyway. Things that are ***not good and right and true and pleasing to the Lord***. And then see Jesus hanging on a cross, and know: **I am the sinner, but He is executed as one.**

At that moment (or those moments), what is ***good and right and true and pleasing to the Lord*** . . . is to do and say what you have come here today to do and say: to repent and once again receive the healing washing of your Saviour's forgiveness; to repent and receive the gift of His Body and Blood. For here is Christ shining on you. Shining in your eyes, in your hearts, in your minds, and in your lives. As He did for the blind man, so He does here for you. Raising you from the death of sin to life - a new life - in Him.

A new life you now get to live. Perhaps, like the blind man, you will be met with rejection and accusation. Maybe you will get thrown out of people's lives for your faith.

Maybe. Jesus said if it happened to Him it will happen to you. But this, then, too: if they couldn't overcome Him, they will not be able to overcome you. For the risen one who raised you is with you still, no matter what happens. And that's not just a rumor, but promise; the reality we now live in. The reality that because His grave is empty, He is with us and heaven is full. Full of the dead who are raised, the blind who can see, the deaf who can hear - full of sinners for whom Jesus hung to forgive, and rose to take with Him to Paradise, where there is no darkness or night, only light (Revelation 22:5).

So this blind man learned quite a lesson that day. But received an even greater gift. He learned a new way of thinking, and received a new way to live. He knew what he deserved, but rejoiced in what God had come to give Him. And that sometimes what seems like the absolute worst things to see are the best things that could happen. Talk about getting your life turned upside down!

But this too: he learned the importance of asking the right questions. For the wrong question was: *Lord, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?* The right question is: *Lord, who died, that this man and his parents may live? That I may live.* That's a new way of thinking. In the way of the Gospel, not the way of the Law. The way of Jesus. The way of forgiveness. The way of gift. The way of life. That we may see right, think right, believe right, and live right.

That's what the blind man learned that day. The best news of all. That was he born in sin? Yes, as we all are. *But it's not how you start, it's how you end.* With eyes of faith to see the light. With eyes of faith to see your Jesus.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.