

Sunday October 16, 2022
Lesson 7: Blinded by the Truth
Scripture: John 9: 1-7; 35-38

Context:

This fall we continue our series titled “Freedom.” Our second unit is titled “Justice” and looks at scriptures where God advocates for those who are vulnerable, in need, or those maligned by society. Today’s scripture lesson comes from the gospel of John and looks at one of the miracles stories of Jesus healing a blind man. Our purpose will be to acknowledge how Jesus looks at the afflicted through the lens of their self-worth and not their shortcomings.

The story begins with Jesus walking through the city of Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles, beginning in chapter seven. During this time, Jesus meets with various leaders and debate his identity as he continues to heal and teach. We come to chapter nine, where Jesus sees someone who is blind from birth. The disciples ask who sinned, this man or his parents. Their question reflects the common quest to search for a relation between human suffering and human causality.¹ Jesus refuses to name a culprit, reminding them and us how we sometimes miss the right question or misplace meaning.

For Jesus, the moment becomes an opportunity to heal the man and demonstrates the power of God. When Jesus says he is “manifesting God’s works,” he is not being glib about human pain and he is not assuring all human sufferings are so God can perform miracles. Instead, it is a statement on how God will overcome the man’s impairment in a way and a time known to God.² Thus, God will show God’s light in the face of this situation and not because of the disciples or anyone else demanding it to prove God or to show a cause and effect with human behavior.

Jesus heals the man by spitting on the ground and making a paste to put on the man’s eyes. Afterwards, he instructs the man to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. The man comes back healed and can see.

Yet the text takes a turn with sections not included in our focal passages. There are people upset the man has been healed on the Sabbath, and there is frustration on how Jesus has done the healing. Jesus’ identity has been a source of controversy and now results in people questioning his power. A debate emerges where the blind man and his parents are questioned. There is a question about who has a power to heal, and people seem upset at the man who has been healed. A few people are still not appeased by his responses and the man is expelled from the community of faith.

Jesus goes to find this man and intentionally seeks to ask him what he believes and if he knows of the one who heals and makes all people whole. He asks him if he knows the Human One (Son of God in some texts) and the man seeks to find him, to see him and believe. Jesus reveals his identity, and the man says he believes Jesus is the one who is the Human One and begins to worship him. The God of light and truth comes forth and someone who was once blind now sees the Lord who makes all things new and whole.

¹ Sloyan, Gerard. “John.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 115.

² Ibid.

Application

For whatever reason, most humans like to know answers and facts to why things happen or occur as they do. Think of the young child, who in getting to a certain stage of life, loves to say “why?” Why is the sky blue? Why does the word “no” mean to stop? Why do I have to eat vegetables if I do not like them? Little ones though are not the only ones to ask the questions affiliated with the word why. Even adults search to discover the “whys” of humanity, trying to link cause and effect to give us nice, neat answers to this life.

We see this approach to thinking in the story of Jesus and the blind man in the gospel of John. Lest we judge the disciples too harshly for their question of who sinned to lead to such an event, we might take a step back and think of all the times we have done the same thing. Too many times I have had people come to me as a pastor seeking counsel as previous pastors or friends have implied their suffering or pain comes from their sins or the sins of previous generations. For whatever reason, this thought process of sin leading to present predicaments of suffering and pain continues to haunt us and creeps into how we approach life.

I often wish people would go back and reread this story about Jesus and his words when it comes to how we see pain and suffering, as well as those with afflictions. When we move to the point where we’ve assigned the why, we have moved to the point of being God, which is not the seat God has invited us to sit in. Instead, we see in this scripture passage how God invites us to see the intrinsic, beautiful self-worth of each individual and to celebrate who God has made.

All of us live in a world where self-worth is based on things which can be a collective expectation on individuals in a society. These things can include a various range of ideals whether it be our vocation and how much we make to our place in family dynamics and the role to which we are assigned. There are beliefs about the way we should act and be according to those around us, and sometimes we enjoy those designations and find meanings in them.

Yet as our scriptures point to us today, those things do not carry the final say in our identity. Our first and foremost identity comes from the fact we were created and made by God. No one and nothing can take away from us this gift and it is something which we should give thanks for and celebrate each day.

The Lord knows we will sin and make mistakes. We all do as the account of original sin makes clear. Humans err and make decisions which bring hurt upon us and those we love. Even those of us who strive for perfection and never making a mistake will end up doing something in which we negate the goodness of God in our attempt to be something or someone. All of us have our shortcomings, and all of us struggle with various things in our lives.

Perhaps the greatest temptations we all face as humans as to when we are wounded with “afflictions,” is to try and compensate for them. We do things like acting out and being belligerent to others. Or we try to control others and their behaviors and lives. We might even believe our afflictions are such we do not matter, so we blend in with the world around us.

The good news for all of us and for all those afflicted with something (and we are all afflicted because we all have our stuff) is God loves us because we are the children of God. God created us all and made each one of us in God’s image. As a result, God also calls us to look to those around us and see the self-worth of each individual. You do not have to like them, be in relationship with them in a formal way, or know why they act the way they do. Yet we are called to see each person as a child of God, made in God’s image. Each person is a person of sacred worth because Jesus came for all people so the whole world might know of God’s love.

How do we try to assign affliction to people based on sin or their parents' sin? What does it mean to look at others as Jesus did, as people who God made as well? Why do you think Jesus makes clear this man's blindness is not an affliction for sin? How can we respond when we hear people assert someone is being punished for their sin or someone else's sin? Who are people who remind you of the importance of your self-worth and how can you help to encourage their own self-worth?

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