

**Third Sunday in Lent**  
March 15, 2020  
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**John 9:1-7,13-17,34-39** As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2** His 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 works of God might be displayed in him. **4** As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. **5** While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."  
**6** After saying 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.  
**13** They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. **14** Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. **15** Therefore 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."  
**16** Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided.  
**17** Then 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."  
**34** To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.  
Spiritual Blindness  
**35** Jesus 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."  
**37** Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."  
**38** Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.  
**39** Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

**"Faith over Fear"**

Westroads Mall Shooting - December 5, 2007. Some things that are going on around us, we just can't ignore them. And the best way for us to address them is by turning to God's Word for guidance, correction, and comfort. In this case, today with the concerns over the spread of the Corona Virus, we actually don't need to scrap the readings that we originally planned out for our worship today. They fit really nicely to address some of the biggest concerns on our hearts today.

In John chapter 9, when Jesus restores sight to a man born blind, he isn't just helping him with a healing. Jesus is giving the gift of faith. As we look at what Jesus does for the man, how Jesus overcomes some prejudices and takes the now seeing man deeper into a relationship with him, we get to come along as we learn about faith. And here is where we

see faith is a perfect antidote fear. Faith isn't just a feeling inside yourself. Faith isn't just wishful thinking that things will turn out the way you want. Faith isn't the power of your own positivity to make things better. Faith has to have an object. You have to believe in something. Even better, faith trusts in someone. And that trust in Jesus gives confidence to face some uncertain things in life. That's how faith overcomes fear.

Faith is what Jesus gives us to cut through so much confusion, so many things that are clouding our minds and thoughts.

Obstacle #1: False assumptions about sin and suffering.

One historian describes the way Evangelicalism developed in this country. It was so different than the established churches on the East Coast that were imported from the old countries - congregationalism, episcopalianism, Catholicism. So often people were just born into those churches without really evaluating the teachings. There was more concern with the organization and less concern for the individual. Evangelicalism, or at least the roots of it, came as a breath of fresh air with an emotional intensity and concern for the common people.

But by the time of the Second Great Awakening after the American Revolution, the movement had imported ideas of political liberty as basically the same as spiritual liberty. Revivalist preachers were more celebrity than shepherds, more entrepreneurial than scriptural, more focused on numbers than soul, and deliberately manipulated emotions of their listeners to achieve their results. She poses the question this way: "When America met Christianity, guess who won?" (Nancy Pearcy) There will always be a clash between Christianity and culture. Our choice will be between letting the culture transform our Christianity or working to make the Christian faith transform our culture. Obviously, you can't transform an entire culture, but you can be critical of the culture and evaluate it based on the truth of the Bible.

Let's restate this as an obstacle to the faith that Jesus gives us, the faith that overcomes fear. The first obstacle is about false assumptions.

In John chapter 9, it comes out in the initial question posed by Jesus' disciples: "**Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?**" (John 9:2) It's a very natural thought. It's a natural human assumption that pain and suffering and assume it must have a cause. As believers we take sin seriously and assume sickness and death, disabilities and tragedies must be rooted in some person's sin. But Jesus is teaching us something very important here. Jesus isn't even drawn into the debate with the disciples: "**Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.**" (John 9:3) We can't always trace every episode of pain or suffering back to one sin or pin it on one person. Sometimes unpleasant things happen just because of the presence of sin in our world. And rather than look for someone to blame, Jesus teaches us to always turn to God for his solution. Turn to God and trust in his solution for pain and suffering, whatever it might be.

So the solution to obstacle #1: Evaluate your assumptions with God's Word. We can get so wrapped up in our speculations, our uncertainties, our guessing games, that we lose sight of the clear message from God's Word. Look to Jesus for what he is doing. Trust that whatever is happening God will use it to bring his people into a deeper relationship with him.

Obstacle #2: Spiritual Stubbornness.

There is more at stake here than if you are overreacting to the Corona Virus or if you are downplaying the seriousness of it. Of course, I understand that what is at stake with this disease is your health and the safety of our community. So I don't say that lightly. But when we are so set in our ways, when we assume we have the answers, when we've become so blind to the facts right in front of us, then it actually puts our spiritual welfare at risk.

See, the Pharisees had already had multiple run ins with Jesus. They had made up their minds about Jesus. And because the way Jesus went about his teaching and serving, the **"Jewish leaders...already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue."** (John 9:22) With this additional run in with Jesus, they can't take the evidence at face value. A significant portion of them refuse to believe Jesus could even be a prophet sent from God because he restored sight to this man on the Sabbath Day. Now, of course, if Jesus had actually been breaking God's laws for the sake of his own ministry success, then we should all question the validity of his ministry. But Jesus hadn't actually broken any of God's requirements for keeping the Sabbath Day holy. He had only transgressed the traditions of the rabbis when he made mud and placed it on the eyes of the blind man.

We get so wrapped up in how things affect us that we lose sight of the bigger picture. Everything gets filtered through a lens of personal narcissism. When we are worried and anxious is it because we don't believe Jesus can help us with serious situations? Do we believe in Jesus intellectually but then functionally write off spiritual help as useless for real world problems? Do we become so consumed by the chaos surrounding us that we can't even focus on Jesus? Do we confess faith in Jesus but then act like we have to fend for ourselves when we're in trouble?

Solution #2: Courage of conviction rests on the evidence.

The man whose sight had been restored had courage even when questioned by the hostile religious leaders. He could have lied when he saw how divided they were. He could have refused to get drawn into their fight when he came to grips with how contentious this issue was getting. He could have just shrugged his shoulders and just said he didn't know anything about the man who opened his eyes. But instead he is honest. He confesses that Jesus has to be in some sort of category considered to be a prophet of God.

Jesus takes the blind man deeper. Just healing his physical blindness isn't his ultimate goal for him. Jesus leans that he has been tossed out by the Pharisees. So he reengages with him: **"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"** (John 9:35) He's just confessed that Jesus must be some sort of prophet, some kind of change agent from God. But for Jesus, that's not enough. This man needs more than a miracle working teacher. Jesus doesn't just have the power to

heal disabilities and cure diseases. Jesus came to rescue souls from spiritual ignorance and stubbornness. Jesus wants every one of us to have a trust in him as our ultimate Rescuer. Jesus wants all of us to rely on him for guidance through life, correction from assumptions, and blessings for chaotic and challenging times.

Today some people are drawing parallels to the deadly plagues that wiped out half the population of Europe in the Middle Ages. When the Black Death re-emerged in Luther's city of Wittenberg and neighboring towns, not surprisingly, Luther had something to say about it. But his advice probably goes against so much of what we are feeling today. First, "Luther argued that anyone who stands in a relationship of service to another has a vocational commitment not to flee." (Yang) That included pastors who could stay on the front lines and offer comfort to souls in distress. In meant public servants who could stay and maintain order in society. But he didn't limit this encouragement to people who had a professional obligation to serve others. Even people without medical training can offer to provide for the sick and suffering. Out of love for God, they will seek out ways to love their neighbors. He recognizes that human beings have a natural urge for self preservation. But he urges us to constantly consider how to carry out two good principles from God: "honoring the sanctity of one's own life, and honoring the sanctity of those in need." (Yang)

Of course, for God's people the practical things we do in our day to day lives, even in a time of crises, just reflect being in touch with a bigger reality we have by faith. We can call it walking by faith instead of fear. Luther said: "All of us have the responsibility of warding off this poison to the best of our ability because God has commanded us to care for the body." In other words we can pray that this outbreak isn't as bad as what some are predicting. But we can also prepare for the worst. And that means preparing wisely recognizing the gifts God has given you. Don't prepare selfishly. But don't foolishly put God to the test either. Instead prepare for the unknown based on what you do know as a child of God.

Walking by faith means loving your neighbor. Love the people especially when they are acting crazy. Just think how brightly Christian kindness and compassion will stand out in our world today. When I am stressed out, I know I get impatient easily with my wife. When I don't sleep well I tend to yell at my kids over dumb stuff. When your neighbor is freaking out about contagious disease, they will probably not be their best self. You will want to scream at people because they are being selfish. Show them grace instead. You will want to scold people for overreacting or not acting at all. Show them kindness. Think of what they need instead of what you want to give them.

The truth is, we don't know what will happen tomorrow or next week or next month. But as we face uncertainty, we face it in faith. Not possessing mystical powers to peer into the unknown and reveal unknowable mysteries. Not by just preferring to see the world with your own set of values, traditions or personal beliefs. No, Jesus is the starting place and the ending place for faith. You can approach the uncertainties of this world knowing that Jesus isn't just a miracle worker or teacher. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus doesn't just give you coping mechanisms or the ability to tap into your inner stranger or some supernatural powers. Jesus is your Savior.

Jesus faced certain agonies of hell on the cross. He certainly did it for you. Jesus stared down a certain death on the cross. He did it to spare you the torments of hell. And because Jesus faced down your soul's most fearful enemy and didn't blink, Jesus gives you someone you can trust in. Jesus secured a guaranteed spot for you at the side of your heavenly Father. You know how it will end. Jesus gives you assurance of an eternal destiny free from sickness and disease, sadness and fear. And so today you can find your ultimate security in Christ. Faith in Jesus overcomes fear. Amen.