

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the light of the world who brings light into our darkness, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

This isn't the first time I've preached on this story of the man born blind. I'm really familiar with this story. In seminary I took a class on the Gospel of John and this was the story I picked to do my in-depth Exegetical paper on. I first encountered this story about the man who was born blind shortly after Melanie was born. I was seeking answers about why God allows innocent babies to be born with disabilities. So, it's not surprising I was drawn to this story. I mean the disciples even asked Jesus who sinned, the man or his parents. That was the ancient mindset. Those who had wealth and health were considered blessed by God. They had obviously led a sin free life and were reaping the rewards set aside for them from God. On the other hand, the poor and those whose health had prematurely failed them must have sinned in some way and this was God's way of punishing them. When someone was born with a debilitating condition, the only question was whose sin caused the trouble the infant or the parents... In case you have a hard time relating to a man born blind, we can modernize this story. Let's say the disciples were watching CNN or Fox News over the past 5 days. They ask Jesus, "Who sinned, these Ukrainians or their parents?" ...

Before we laugh off the attitudes of the ancients, let's examine our own attitudes when it comes to blessings and curses. For many Christians, a windfall of

cash is said to be a blessing even though in many cases it turns out to be the opposite. What about the curses? When something bad happens do we still blame the victim? Maybe not as overtly as they did back in Jesus' day or my example of the current war raging in Europe, but the attitude that someone must have done something to deserve all the bad stuff that's happening is still prevalent today.

When Melanie was an infant, she developed a large cyst on her backside, right in the area of her tail bone. We took her to the largest hospital in the region, the University of Wisconsin, at Madison Wisconsin. They decided it was caused by an infected diaper rash. Imagine how that made these new parents feel. The doctors, without pointing fingers directly at us, basically said we did a poor job cleaning our baby's bottom. PJ and I both knew this wasn't the case, but who were we to contradict what all those highly educated doctors had diagnosed. Well, sure enough after healing up, it came back again about 6 months later. This time our local pediatrician called the university hospital and after being told they would treat it the same way, he decided he could take care of it in his office. Even he didn't want to question the authority of the university-trained specialists. Well, you guessed it, after another 6 or 8 months it came back again. This time our local pediatrician called the head of the university hospital, and they finally took notice. After exploratory surgery, they discovered the core of the problem wasn't poor hygiene, but a tumor called a teratoma. This type of tumor can go undetected for

many years if it's located deep in the body, but because this one was so close to the surface, it kept coming back and causing all kinds of problems. We never did get an apology from those highly educated doctors for the year and a half we spent blaming ourselves for what scientists say is a tumor that is believed to be an undeveloped twin. So yes, sometimes the parents are still blamed for the problems of their children...

As I said, when I first encountered this story as an adult it was in my search for meaning and truth. If you go back and re-read the answer Jesus gives the disciples, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; *he was born blind* (emphasis mine) so that God's works might be revealed in him...", you would be led to believe God either caused or allowed the man to be born blind so that people could see God in action when Jesus healed him. It seemed to me that God was using this man like a pawn in God's game of "See How Great I Am!" So, I began praying for God to work His healing miracle on Melanie. God did send us a miracle in healing Melanie's tumor after a long while and God even sent a lightening Bolt to strike outside of Melanie's bedroom window which apparently fixed her backwards heart as well. To this day, she hasn't had to undergo the open-heart surgery all those university doctors predicted she would need before she could survive. Because she seemed to have had her major physical disabilities healed, for a long time, I was satisfied that God allowed some bad things to happen so that

we would eventually see God's glory. Gradually, I began reexamining my thoughts on this matter and realized it must be a pretty cruel, sadistic, or totally uncaring God who would do such things.

As I reflect on my life, I can now say that this story and my search for meaning led me to seek a seminary education. I was still, after all those years, trying to understand why God allows the seemingly innocent to suffer. I'll be honest with you, reading the Book of Job was no help. Taking almost every class in the Old and New Testaments offered by the Seminary was no help. Even an entire year studying Systematic Theology, where I studied every Christian doctrine we hold as true didn't help. I was ready to give up and admit there was no answer, until my last semester and the final class I took on the Gospel of John.

One of our tasks as we did our deep dive into the story for our paper in that class was to go back to the Greek text and translate it into English for ourselves. We were not to look at any of the several English translations already in print, but to do our own translating, word for word. When I did this I discovered our New Revised Standard Version, that we use in the ELCA, has added something that's not in the Greek text. When Jesus says, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; *he was born blind* so that God's works might be revealed in him..." The "*he was born blind*" is nowhere in the Greek text. The Greek actually says "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; but this happened today so that God's works might be

revealed in him...” Jesus was talking about the fact that he and the disciples had met this man, born blind, while walking along the road, not the fact that he was born blind. You see Jesus had already addressed the question of who sinned. His answer, neither the parents nor the man, but now that I’m here, I will do God’s work and heal him. When talking about suffering and all the bad stuff that happens, Martin Luther had three favorite enemies, sin, the world, and the devil. Saint Paul attributed all the evil in the world to what he called “The Flesh.” The point is they never referred to the evil as being caused by or even allowed by God, who they believed to be loving, kind, and merciful. God is love and God’s loving kindness endures forever.

What a weight lifted what a truth revealed! If you don’t have the time to learn ancient Greek, may I suggest you do what we were not allowed to do in seminary, invest in either several different English translations or a computer program that allows you to compare the different translations. If I had known to do that all those years ago, I would not have lost so much time loving the God who created and sustains me and everything else in all cosmos. Our loving God doesn’t cause suffering just so he can later show us his glory. Suffering is brought about by the effects of sin in the natural world. When sin entered the world it effected every aspect of the entire creation. God isn’t in the business of making more suffering, there’s already too much suffering and God is in the business of taking our

suffering upon himself. That's why He became incarnate in the first place. Not to condemn the world, but to save the world.

Today the world is on the brink of yet another World War in Europe. Millions of innocent people are in the line of fire. God isn't causing or even allowing it to happen. That's on us. It's human sin and greed and fear of one another that's causing the war drums to beat once again. I pray we can all learn from our Lord and Savior how to pray for our enemies and how to love one another so that we can avoid more innocent bloodshed. We seem to always want to ask the question, "Why do these bad things happen to good or innocent people?" After all these years, my answer is why not... All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. So, why shouldn't bad things happen to all of us? I think I have a pretty good answer to that question. For God so loved... that He gave...

May the God of love intercede in our lives so that we can all see God's Works and glorify His Name. May the leaders of nations sit down with one another and learn to forgive the past and work toward a peaceful tomorrow. May the one who brought sight to a man born blind bring vision to our leaders and peace to our world. To quote another one of my favorite hymns, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me." Amen.