

Before we can ever get to the miracle of this morning's story, or to the sequence of events in one of the longest stories in the Gospels, the Disciples have named a foundational problem for Christian faith.

Prior to Moses coming down Mt. Sinai with the 10 Commandments, Judaism has known when we broke covenant with God. All of Jewish Temple worship was based on Sacrifice in atonement for our Sins. God is Perfect, God's Commandments specify right relationship with God and with Creation, but we regularly fall short of the glory of God, so what do we need to do to get right with GOD? The Book of Leviticus, not only differentiates between a crime punishable by Death, A Felony and a Misdemeanor, but whether those making atonement for sin are rich or poor... When Abraham a wealthy property holder and Tribal Chief is told to make sacrifice for the gift of his son Isaac, the equivalent value is a Ram; yet when Mary and Joseph give birth to Jesus their sacrifice is 2 Turtle Doves.

In Reformed Churches, we regularly begin worship with a Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon. Not making a sacrificial Offering, but accepting responsibility by naming our broken relationship with God. Whenever there is a problem: A Man Blind since birth; a Mudslide in California; the origins of COVID19; inequities of Race and Hate 175 years after the Civil War, there is a human desire to assign blame. Speaking with a doctor recently, she said, "Part of the reason we have an Opioid crisis in the world is we have a PAIN CRISIS, everyone is suffering from something." The underlying question is WHY IS THERE PAIN in the world? For a baby to be born blind, WHO SINNED?

Jesus says: You are asking the Wrong Question, the Cause & Effect is not who Sinned to CAUSE Suffering! Blame is about binding our pain and anger on someone else, as means of ridding ourselves our suffering. Instead of OBJECTIFYING others as Scapegoats for our Blame, look the person in the face, listen, and help to alleviate their suffering.

No One in this story, not the Narrator, not the Disciples, not the Pharisees, not even the man's parents ever identify him by name, he is just a beggar blind since birth, a weight on the family and on the community. Jesus stops, looks in the face of the man, combines his own bodily fluids with the dust of the earth, touches the man's blindness, and the man can see. Rather than the Cause & Effect of A Blind man; so did he sin or his parents to cause this? Jesus touches his suffering. Jesus binds his incarnate life force with the dust of Creation to heal the man's suffering. Witnessing that Act, NOW What do you believe? The issue is not BELIEF in Miracles. The issue is not SIN requires ATONEMENT. The issue is Knowing PAIN and SUFFERING can be taken away by investing yourself in the other, what are you willing and able to do?

Now that Patio Sale is OVER, Now that the Organ is Installed, After the Resurrection of Easter happens, on Sunday, April 23rd at 1pm we will be showing a film from South Sudan, different from the one we showed last year, but from the Clinic I helped to create in South Sudan. Where in the midst of on-going tribal wars, we recognized one of the greatest Health Crises on the Equator in South Sudan is blindness. So we sent in Eye Surgeons from Salt Lake City, Utah to restore eyesight, but with an added twist. As patients lay in recovery for 3 days with their eyes bandaged, we intentionally placed patients from the Nuer Tribe next to one from the Dinka tribe, next to one from the Murle Tribe. So that after surgery, when each was the most vulnerable, they would talk together, and when the bandages were removed they would see that they had been in conversation making relationship with their enemies. I hope that you will put this on your calendars.

But the emphasis of the story becomes once Jesus has healed this man Blind since Birth, what is the effect, what happened? This man was sent by Jesus to the Pool of Siloam which is a sacred place of healing, a fresh water pool in the City of Jerusalem. He washed his eyes and he could see clearly for the first time.

Neighbors, people who could recognize him questioned if this was the same man? STILL No one claims his humanity by name! And they are split between those who say that HE IS THE SAME MAN but now he sees. VERSUS Those who claim that as a Beggar Blind from Birth, if he sees, then he cannot be that man. Are we still the same person if our circumstance changes? Who is the Career Soldier without their uniform? The question every minister faces at retirement is, whenever I have come into a new community I had a ready-made identity as the Pastor of a Church, who am I, how do I make friends, if I am no longer their pastor, but neighbor? If my parent or my spouse dies after a lifetime together, am I now an Orphan, who am I now? I would confess to you that when I came to serve as your Pastor, I was intimidated. I had served churches where we had celebrations of new marriage every week, and at least once a month we celebrated new life with a Baptism, so everything was about hope and new life each week. But in a retirement community, how depressing would it be to regularly acknowledge Death/ And then COVID... But this is where seeing through believing comes to bear, because with Arleen and Margaret and Mark and Dave, we are not focused upon DEATH, but in CELERATION of LIFE and FAITH, HOPE & RESURRECTION!

This controversy is brought before the Pharisees' Council, who raise a different set of questions. Jesus healed this man's blindness on the Sabbath day! By what authority did someone do work on the Sabbath?

The Pharisees bring the man's parents to testify, and recognizing the trap, the parents of the man state: "He is of age to be a man, he is no longer our child, ask him!" When teen-agers, or younger children, commit mass murder, are they responsible or their parents who owned the weapons?

Again, a second time, the Pharisees call the man to testify, and he tells what happened to him. Jesus healed him. Then for the first time this man who now is able to see, asks the correct question. "Jesus saw my pain and suffering and healed me. He must be a prophet sent from God. Do you want to become his disciples?" The Pharisees hurled insults at the man, stating "We are disciples of Moses! We know God spoke to Moses. Who this Jesus is we do not know, we do not even know where he comes from." And the Man whom Jesus caused to SEE testifies: "Now this is amazing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. God does not listen to sinners, GOD listens to the Godly who do God's will. No one has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing, BUT HE DID." And the Pharisees threw him out of the Temple.

Jesus finds this man and asks The Man who had been given sight, "If he believes in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, that I might believe in him?" And Jesus says, "Now you have sight and You have now seen him, in fact he is the one speaking to you now." And the man said "LORD, I believe." To which Jesus responded, "For judgment I have come into the world, so that the blind may see, and those who see will recognize their blindness." Some Pharisees overheard them and asked "So, Are we blind?" And Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin, but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

This week I heard a story, I had never heard before, about a man who saw through his faith. There was a man who for 30 years grew the very best corn. Every year at State fair, his corn won 1st prize. What was remarkable, was that he regularly shared his seed corn with all his neighbors, free of charge. A reporter came to his fields and asked, "So why do you give your good seed corn to your neighbors. Would it not be better to give them inferior grain, to ensure yours would be best?" And the man said, "You do not know about the growing of corn. Corn is cross-pollinated by the wind. You do not know where the wind comes from or where it is going to. So if I gave my neighbors inferior grain, that would pollinate with my crop. By giving them good seed, for free, their planting increases the quality of my produce." Let those who have eyes to see: See! Those who choose to not see make themselves Blind.