

Text: John 9 (various). Third Sunday in Lent. **March 23, 2014.**

Grace and peace are yours through our suffering Savior, Jesus. Amen.

Certain people inspire very different reactions. Politicians seems to be especially good at this. I know it's dangerous to mention politics in church. Now we have the two things you are never supposed to talk about, together: religion and politics. I'm not taking a side. This is just to illustrate how people can have very different reactions to the same person. All I have to do is say the name, "Barack Obama," and some people erupt in cheers for a man who has given everyone a chance at health care and others boo loudly at a socialist trying to rule every aspect of our lives. Same with Scott Walker. A champion for righting Wisconsin's fiscal ship, or a man who has destroyed the lives of many workers? Again, I'm not taking a side, just making the point of different reactions.

People had very different reactions to Jesus. Jesus was not a politician, yet you can find almost every reaction under the sun to Jesus. He's a liar. Lunatic. Lord. He's mad. He's bad. He's God. This account of Jesus healing a man born blind illustrates this clearly. Many reactions to Jesus. What's your reaction to Jesus? That's the question each one has to answer. What my reaction to Jesus? What's my reaction to Jesus?

The first reaction to Jesus was, "Why?" Why? Jesus, why was this man born blind? There was a common idea that illness at birth, especially blindness, was the sign of a curse from God. Surely, this must be God getting back at this man for some terrible sin, or maybe his parents did something terrible? Did they take drugs before he was born? Was he born less than nine months after the wedding if you know what I mean?

That opens up a bigger question we have all asked many times. "Why does God allow suffering?" If God is almighty and he is all loving, why doesn't he use his power to remove all suffering? Why doesn't he prevent all suffering from ever happening in the first place? It's a logical question. Why did grandma get cancer, she was a good person? Why do the good die young? Why does anyone die young? Look at Jesus' answer. **Neither this man nor his parents sinned. But this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in him.** Now certainly the blind man and his parents had sinned, but his blindness wasn't God's judgment on some terrible, specific sin. Notice how Jesus sees this suffering as an opportunity to show his power. One of the signs of the Messiah, the promised Savior, was that he would give sight to the blind. We heard that in both of our other Scripture readings. This man's blindness is still showing us God's work today. It's still pointing to Jesus as the Savior. Maybe God allows suffering to show his power over suffering. God allows suffering to show us all things work together for good to those who love God.

Having answered the, "Why?" reaction, let's move on to some others. There was fear. That's the reaction of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the best looking people in the world on the outside. They kept all the laws outwardly and even added a bunch more so they could show how outwardly good they were. But when Jesus came along and healed a blind man, they did not rejoice at the work of God. They pointed out a minor violation of one of their man-made laws. The Sabbath was God's day. A day for no work. Making mud was work. Jesus had made mud on the Sabbath. Jesus had broken the Sabbath. He's a law breaker, a sinner. The Pharisees were more concerned about their laws than about people. The Pharisees were afraid they would lose their position if this Jesus guy went around healing people. He had to be stopped. And he can't be from God. He doesn't keep the Sabbath.

The other reaction was surprise. How could Jesus do this? If he's an ordinary sinner, how can he heal people? If he's a regular guy, how can he be fulfilling the signs of the promised Savior? I'm surprised. I'm confused. I don't know what to think. The sign of healing a blind man points to him as the Savior, but the powers that be are calling him a lawbreaker, a sinner. I can't figure it out.

There was a deep division among the people. Sound like politics today? The people were deeply divided over Jesus. Politicians today try to label themselves as unifiers, not dividers. Look at what Jesus did. He divided people. Yes, Jesus united people who followed him. But Jesus also united people who opposed him. Jesus was as much divider as unifier. People took sides. People had very different reactions to Jesus.

What's your reaction? Fear? Surprise? Confused? Why? It's time to confess. At different times, we have all had all of those reactions to Jesus. Jesus, why do you let me suffer? I come. I give. I help. Bring some suffering to those people who don't care about you. I'm confused. Jesus, you say your church will never perish, but the fastest growing religion is no religion. If you are so powerful and so loving, why does it seem like no one cares about you anymore? And deep down, there's a fear, a sinful fear. If I live my life for Jesus, I will lose my life. I can't get drunk with my buddies. I don't have the cool stories to tell about what happened in Vegas and stays in Vegas. And how do I know there really is another life? How do I know that living for Jesus is all worth it? I'm afraid I'll give up the only life I ever get and will have nothing to show for it. Or maybe we go to the other sinful, Pharisee extreme. What do I need Jesus for? I'm a good person. I've never even been to Vegas. I'm faithful to my wife. I stay out of bars. I do my job. I pay my taxes. What's Jesus got against me?

Judgment! Whoa! Wait! That's not my reaction to Jesus. I thought Jesus is the loving guy, not the judgment guy. Did you hear Jesus himself say it? **For judgment I came into this world.** Wow! Jesus came into this world for judgment! That self-righteous reaction of I don't need Jesus. Judged! That confused reaction of, "Why doesn't Jesus do things my way?" Judged! That sinful fear, "I'm giving up too much for Jesus!" Judged. That sinful accusation of Jesus, "Why me?" Judged. If you think you can see without Jesus you are judged.

But when I admit that I am blind then Jesus opens my eyes. When I realize I can't see a thing, I don't have a clue why Jesus is doing this, I can't possibly crawl into God's mind, then Jesus gives me sight. Jesus washes away my sins just like Jesus washed away this man's blindness. I was blind, but now I see. But did you notice the strange way in which Jesus gave sight to this man? He put mud on his eyes. Mud makes it worse. Mud doesn't help you see. But for Jesus' own reasons, which we'll never know until heaven, Jesus used mud, had this man wash and he went home seeing. How can this not remind us of baptism. Baptism seems so silly on the surface. A little water and a few words. But that's Jesus' promise. And that water and those words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," really do wash away sin. That's Jesus way to open our eyes. And so the eyes of the blind are opened. Opened to see Jesus as the Savior. Opened to see our relationship with Jesus is all good, because of what Jesus did, not because of what we did. Jesus gives sight to the blind, who admit their sins. Jesus opens the eyes of those who see, "I can't rescue myself. I need Jesus."

There's the reaction Jesus wants us to have to him. I need Jesus. It's really fascinating to trace the growing faith of the blind man through John chapter nine. Some of his reactions we read and others we didn't. Read all of John chapter nine later and see this progression. In verse eleven, the blind man calls Jesus a man. Ok. Not much there. But in verse seventeen, he calls Jesus a prophet. Now we seem to be getting somewhere. In verse 33 the blind man says that Jesus is from God. And in verse 38, the blind man falls on his face to worship Jesus as God himself. The blind man confessed his full and complete faith in Jesus. Finally, the blind man's faith was so strong, he was willing to be kicked out of the synagogue for his confession of Jesus. That meant social ostracism. People wouldn't talk to you or hang out with you. People might not even look at you. But when the blind man's spiritual eyes were opened, all he wanted was Jesus. All he needed was Jesus. All he had was Jesus.

Where are you on that scale? What's your reaction to Jesus? Maybe Jesus still needs to open your eyes to see how blind you really are. Jesus patiently spoke with the Pharisees and he will patiently keep speaking with you. Maybe if you're still struggling in that man, prophet, teacher reaction, Jesus is using his Word today to strengthen you and lift your reaction up a notch. Maybe you believe in Jesus, but you are struggling with losing a friend who is leading you away from Jesus. Jesus opens your eyes to see Jesus is all you need. Maybe it's a struggle to put Jesus first with your time, your work, your finances. Jesus can open your eyes wider to see, "Jesus is all I need. Jesus is all I have." Maybe you're witnessing to a friend and you can't figure out why he can't see Jesus as clearly as you do. Maybe Jesus is bringing that person along like Jesus did with this blind man. Maybe Jesus is taking them through the reactions that all of us have gone through, the whys, the fear, the confusion, the self-righteousness, to finally react and say, "Lord I believe. Lord I worship." What's my reaction to Jesus? Jesus is all I have. Jesus is all I need. Amen.