

HERE'S MUD IN YOUR EYES

4th Sunday of Lent (April 3, 2011)

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John 9:1-41

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Moral math, we all do it, going from effect to cause. We crave the easy explanation. The man is born blind. Something went wrong. Congenital blindness is not normal. Why did this happen? Was it a freak of nature, an accident, a genetic slip? Did someone sin? His parents perhaps? God must be punishing them. Or perhaps the man himself? That’s crazy, you say. Not to the rabbis of Jesus’ day who said, “There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity.” Job’s friends believed that too. Bad things happen to bad people. Someone must have done something bad, right?

Wrong, says Jesus. God doesn’t do this kind of moral math, and He doesn’t explain why bad things happen. That’s none of our business. This happened **“that the works of God might be manifested”** (John 9:3) in this man. God was making an object lesson out of him.

“I am the light of the world,” Jesus had just said. Light means day and life. The days of creation occur in the light of day. Jesus is the light and life of all. Apart from Jesus there is only darkness and death.

Jesus underscores the point. He spits on the ground, makes mud, anoints the blind man’s eyes with the spitty mud, and tells him to go wash in the pool called “Sent.” Jesus does what only a Creator can do, create and recreate humanity with mud. Adam was made from mud by the hand of God, and now the master Potter Himself takes a bit of mud and fixes the son of Adam eyes.

It’s also a good illustration of how God works - under the opposite. The man can’t see already, and Jesus makes things worse, so to speak, by putting mud in his eyes. Is that any way to treat a blind man on the street? He washes his face in the Siloam pool and comes back seeing for the first time in his life. Here’s mud in your eye! It’s another way of saying may your eyes be opened, may you now see clearly.

God saves the world from Sin by making His Son into Sin. He saves the world from Death by giving His Son into Death. He works under the sign of the opposite, life in the midst of death, sight with mud. He makes the new birth a washing with water, that is Baptism. If you find yourself thinking about Baptism in this story, you are right on target. Sent to the water with the promise of the Word, we emerge from Baptism “seeing” with eyes that were born blind. More on that a bit later! For now, back to the man born blind who now sees with 20/20 clarity.

The religious are suspicious. First of all, blind men don’t spontaneously see. Secondly, if it were a legitimate healing, it would have never occurred on the Sabbath with Jesus’ making mud, since kneading clay was forbidden work on the Sabbath Day. Those were the rules. Religion always operates by the rules. If you break the rules, it won’t work. That’s pure and simple religious ethics.

The rule against kneading clay on the Sabbath Day was supposed to keep you from making bricks. It had nothing to do with healing a blind man’s eyes. Of course, everyone knows that mud can’t do that anyway, unless, of course, the spit and the mud are from the creator Himself, in which case all bets are off. He can do whatever He wants, because He’s the Lord of the Sabbath. But the Pharisees, with all their religious dos and don’ts can’t see that; you see (pun intended) they are the blind ones, blind in their religion and faithlessness.

Religious blindness is the worst form of blindness. It appears to see clearly, but in fact sees nothing. The Pharisees were staring at Jesus in the flesh, they saw the signs that He did, but they were blind to who He is. “How can a man who is a sinner do these things?” To the religious, Jesus was a sinner, a Sabbath breaker. And you know the rules. God doesn’t favor sinners, and He certainly doesn’t work miracles through them. Those are the rules!

They suspect a fraud. They call in the man's parents and give them the third degree, a thorough investigation. They call in the man himself. They've already decided that anyone who says that Jesus is the Messiah will be kicked out of the synagogue. You'll recognize that as drawing a conclusion prior to the evidence. It's like encountering a body with a knife sticking out of its back and the detective concluding, "It must have been a suicide because we don't have murders in this community." Deep denial, we would call it.

The prophet Isaiah saw the same blindness in Israel and said: "***He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear***" (Isaiah 42:20). That's our human condition. We're born blind to God. We can stare at the marvelous order of the universe, look through telescopes and microscopes at a wonderfully complex and intricate cosmos where everything works together in an amazing way, and what do we conclude? It must have happened by itself. Things just sort of organized themselves. Wouldn't that be great if that really happened? All the papers on your desk or things in your garage got organized by themselves? It takes a profound blindness not to see the reflection of a Creator in the creation, but that's our condition.

The darkness is deep, and religion is no help. You can claim to be enlightened and yet be totally in the dark about who God is and who you are in relation to God. The Pharisees were very religious people, pious people, commandment keeping and God fearing people. They held themselves to high moral standards. They taught people the principles of religious living. And yet it was a case of the blind leading the blind. They did not know God in His mercy; they did not see in Jesus God in the flesh. And they decided ahead of time that anyone who even entertained the notion that Jesus was the Messiah would be kicked out of the synagogue.

Jesus heard the man had been excommunicated, so He comes to Him a second time. Remember, the man who had been blind never had seen Jesus. He had no idea what Jesus looked like. "***Do you believe in the Son of Man?***" asked Jesus. "***Who is he that I might believe in Him?***" the man asks in return. "***You have seen Him, and He is now speaking to you.***" "***Lord, I believe,***" the man confesses, and worships Jesus.

That's you, right there, as a baptized believer. No, you haven't seen Jesus, but then, neither had the man. He believed the Word of Jesus that this was the same man who had anointed his eyes with mud and sent to him to the pool. You trust the Jesus you do not see, and you worship Him, having heard His Word to you.

This is His gift to you. You were conceived into a vast darkness as a child of Adam - a deep, hereditary blindness passed down from father to child all the way back to Adam who fell into sin and dragged all humanity into darkness. But the light of the world has dawned on you. You have been "enlightened" in the "sent" waters of Baptism. You have been anointed (christened) not with mud and spit, but with water and the Spirit. You "see" Jesus for who He is because God has given you the 20/20 vision of faith to "see" in the Light of the Day.

Jesus is the light of the world. That is as plain as day. He shines on the world as the world's Light and Life. There is no one in the world on whom Jesus does not shine. The darkness in which the unbelieving world walks is not a darkness due to the absence of light but due to the absence of sight. It is the darkness of unbelief. The sight of faith comes not by seeing but by hearing - hearing the Word of Christ. His Word brings "judgment," (a crisis) to the world. For those who think they see, Jesus will be a light that blinds, so that "those who see may become blind." Before you can know anything about God, you must recognize you know nothing about God. Before you can see, you must recognize that you are blind to the Light that shines on you. But that same Light gives sight to the blind, it opens eyes to see Jesus for who He is as Savior and Redeemer and Christ. This is the great opposite.

Seeing Jesus for who He is, we also see ourselves in that light. We are, as St. Paul puts it, "children of light" who are given to walk in the light of the Lord and bear fruit of light in all that is good and right and true. The reign of darkness is ended. Christ has died and risen. You are baptized into His death and life. You were once in darkness, blind to the light. But baptized, you are now a child of the Light and of the Day. That means you take no part in the works of darkness that lead to death, but you bring everything into the light and day of Christ Jesus.

You are the early risers, for whom the resurrection alarm has already sounded. ***“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you”*** (Ephesians 5:14). So the next time someone offers a toast, “Here’s mud in your eye” smile and reply may the Lord bless you as well and open your eyes that you might see Jesus for in Him all your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Here’s to mud in your eye (lift up the glass of water), In Jesus name, Amen and amen!

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
AMEN.