

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Lent 4

Our Saviour Lutheran Church
March 22, 2020

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Operating in the dark.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, that is what it has felt like for some time now in our country and even in our world...

It has felt like we have been operating in the dark.

PAUSE

A travel ban for folks coming from Europe.

Gatherings of fifty people or more strongly discouraged.

Now, gatherings of ten people or more are strongly discouraged.

Schools shut down for at least two weeks.

Non-essential businesses shut down.

People quarantined for fourteen days.

A vaccine that may not be available to the general public for up to a year.

People hoarding toilette paper and hand sanitizer, and other items.

And then there has been the lack of the test kits to be able to even tell how many people are infected, and where the hot spots are.

The stock market going up and down like some sort of sick roller coaster.

And, the talk is now about how this crisis may last well into summer.

Operating in the dark. Operating in the dark.

Yes, sisters and brothers, that is how it has felt for some time now, like we have been operating in the dark.

It is the great unknown that we as a human race, as a whole human family...

It is the great unknown we have been trying to navigate for some time now.

PAUSE

And so I find it serendipitous that we should have the gospel reading we do on this fourth Sunday in Lent.

Because what do we find in our gospel reading, but a story about a blind man.

A story about a man who cannot see.

A story about a man who has been operating in the dark.

PAUSE

And this story, this story about a blind man teaches some valuable lessons.

And the first lesson is this.

Hardship or disadvantage or suffering is not the consequence of sin.

Let me say that again in case you missed it, "Hardship or disadvantage or suffering is not the consequence of sin."

Our good and gracious God does not inflict a person nor inflict a people with suffering because we have done something wrong.

God does not work in that way.

God does not sit on his high and mighty throne just waiting for us to make mistakes so that God can unleash God's wrath on us.

What kind of sadistic God would we worship if that were the case?

No, our good and gracious God does not take pleasure in punishing the very creatures he has delighted in making.

This is the first lesson in our reading today.

PAUSE

Notice, the disciples approach Jesus when they see this blind man and they ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who has sinned? Who has sinned that this man should be born blind?"

Was it the man himself?

Well...let's think about that.

The man was born blind. He was BORN blind.

He didn't have the opportunity to sin before he was born.

So how could this man be responsible for his own blindness.

Right? Right?

You see, sometimes, we have just got to think these things through.

Or maybe it was the blind man's parents that sinned.

And thus this man's blindness is the consequence of sinful actions by his parents.

Maybe his parents broke some particular law in the Ten Commandments.

Maybe his parents offended and angered God in some way.

And so God then inflicted the man with blindness.

As an aside, Friends, we need to note that this was the general understanding in the ancient world.

Our ancestors of the faith believed strongly in this idea called divine retribution.

PAUSE

And, in light of the Corona virus, some might say a similar thing today, that God is angry with the human race.

That humanity has transgressed somehow against God, and God is now angry, and so God has punished us with the Corona virus.

Our human minds tend to start thinking this way, and asking those questions, “Why? Why has this happened?”

And we think WE can furnish an answer, that WE know, and so WE blame the bad things that happen on God.

But some things, sisters and brothers in Christ...some things are just beyond our knowing.

Sometimes we are just operating in the dark.

It is faulty reasoning to blame God.

It is irresponsible to think that God is sadistic enough to willingly afflict people with suffering.

Our Lord Jesus, says as much.

When Jesus is asked by the disciples, “Who has sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?”...

Jesus says neither this man nor his parents have sinned.

But he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.

PAUSE

You see, the disciples ask the wrong question.

Society in Jesus' day asked the wrong question.

Is it not about trying to appoint blame when there is hardship and suffering in the world?

That is a moot point.

The real question is what are we going to do about it?

How will we respond to the hardship and suffering we experience around us?

How are we going to respond to the darkness, except with light?

PAUSE

Yes, Jesus reveals to us that there is light in the midst of darkness.

For Jesus himself is the light of the world.

And so when we are operating in the dark...

When we are overcome by the unknown and the uncertainty...

When we are burdened by hardship and suffering...

It is then that we remember that Christ is the light.

And we, as his disciples, we who are faithful followers of Christ, we operate not in darkness, WE OPERATE NOT IN DARKNESS.

But instead we respond in the light.

We operate not in darkness, but instead we respond in the light of Christ.

The world may be operating in the dark right now.

The world may be operating in the dark for some time to come.

But, think about it, is it really any different from when the world is functioning under quote, unquote normal times?

Even then in normal times, there is still a sense of operating in the dark, when we as a people still don't fully grasp why there is suffering and hardship in the world.

It is just now in these highly anxious times, that the sense of operating in the dark is all the more elevated.

But even so, we as Christian people, we are light people.

We are people who respond in the light of Christ, even when the world is operating in the dark.

We respond in the light of Christ by seeking to provide comfort and care where we can.

We respond in the light of Christ by seeking to unburden those who are weighed down by hardship and suffering.

We respond in the light of Christ by seeking to lift up the downtrodden.

PAUSE

Yes, sometimes as people it is hard for us to see anything but the darkness, and so we hoard more than our fair share.

And sometimes we ignore the darkness, such that we are indifferent to others, and so continue to gather in crowds, the heck with everyone else.

Sometimes we are like the Pharisees and just can't see, or don't want to see the very power of God which is doing amazing things even in the darkness of the world.

Yes, sometimes it is most difficult for the light of Christ to penetrate in here (point to the heart).

And so we need to come in contact with someone who sees beyond the darkness.

PAUSE

For the blind man whose life was about operating in the dark, Jesus was the one who could see beyond the darkness and transform his reality.

Jesus is the one who would die on the cross, and would be buried in the darkness of the tomb, and yet would rise to new life.

For the blind man then, Jesus was the one who made contact with his life and helped the blind man see beyond the darkness.

Jesus restored his sight.

PAUSE

And, we might say that that image of “new sight” is really a metaphor for us, we who are blind sometimes.

When our sight is blinded...

And when we don't see the light before us...

...when we don't see beyond our own little world, and all the darkness it entails...

Then we need the light of Jesus, then we need to come in contact with someone, to know what it is to see beyond the darkness, to see clearly then the need and suffering around us, that we can respond in the light of Christ, that we can respond with compassion.

And, so I ask, so I ask, who, who has that person been for you?

Who has been that person who has helped you see beyond the darkness?

Who has been Christ for you in your dark times of life?

When have you been blind, and suddenly you saw the hope of Christ, and your life was transformed, such that you then responded with compassion toward others—who has revealed the light of Christ to you?

For me there have been several persons.

When I was in high school two really good friends Mark and Brian, who were and still are faithful Christians, helped me navigate the darkness.

When I was in college it was the pastor of my home church, and the seminarian and campus ministers at college, who helped me navigate the darkness.

During my adult life, it has been my wife, colleagues in the ministry, and others who have helped me navigate the darkness.

But in each and every one of those persons, I had seen in them the face of Christ.

In other words, it has been Christ in them that has revealed the light.

It is Christ who cures our blindness and allows us to see that even if the world operates in darkness, there is the constant hope of the light of Christ.

And it is in responding to others' needs and suffering, that we abide in that light of Christ, even in dark times, most especially in dark times.

PAUSE

And so, the message I want then to leave you with today and really it is a message for every day, is that we need not have to operate in the dark, not this day nor any other day.

No longer do we have to operate in the dark.

For Jesus is the light of the world, which the darkness cannot overcome.

And, living in response to God's grace in Christ, serving our neighbors with compassion, that, my friends, is living in Christ's light.

And so, live in the light of Christ, and dispel the darkness of this world.

Live in the light of Christ, for God has opened our eyes.

Live in the light of Christ, for we were blind but now we see.

Live in the light of Christ, and give thanks...give thanks to Almighty God.

AMEN.