

“...BUT NOW I SEE?”
John 9:1-17; 24-25; 28-41
Preached by Dr. Cahill
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Sunday, March 30, 2014

After reading about Jesus healing the blind man on the Sabbath and the ensuing controversy my first reaction was, “no good deed goes unpunished.” What should have been “and they all lived happily every after” ending instead turned into a one sided cat fight.

The story is straight forward enough. Jesus sees a blind man begging in the temple and decides to take action. He instructs the disciples to fetch the man while he mixed a concoction of mud and his own spit to smear over the man’s eyes. Keep in mind the blind man didn’t come to Jesus, in fact, he never even heard of Jesus, so when the disciples snatched him up and dragged him away he had to be frightened. You can almost hear him begging Jesus not to touch his eyes when Jesus rubbed on the sticky mud. Naturally all the commotion caused a scene triggering still another confrontation.

It all started with a theological question, “Why was this man born blind Jesus? Was it because of his sins or his parent’s sin?”

Even today when someone is born with a disability we automatically ask the same question because we instinctively link bad fortune with bad behavior. But Karma (what goes around comes around) is a Hindu belief, not a biblical teaching which, unfortunately for the Christian, leaves no satisfactory answer to the question, “Why does God allow bad things to happen to people?”

Now, Jesus did give an answer that taken out of context, sounds self-serving and cruel. “He is blind so that God’s power might be seen at work in him.”

Let’s be clear on this, Jesus isn’t saying, “God allowed this man to be born blind to prove a point.” That’s a simplistic reinterpretation of Jesus’ explanation. God doesn’t single us out to suffer so he can step in and save the day. All we can say is human suffering is one of the eternal mysteries that defies any logical explanation and won’t be fully answered until we finally see God face to face.

Having said what Jesus wasn’t saying let’s now listen to what Jesus really was saying: While the man’s blindness is not his or his parent’s fault, God is about to reveal his power by making him see again.

Ironically the blind man’s restoration of sight caused the Pharisees to lose their own. They blinded themselves because they were so fixated on “proper” procedures they couldn’t accept the end result, even if it meant the alleviation of human suffering.

What's more the Pharisees rejected the blind man's healing simply because it was caused by Jesus who refused to knuckle under their authority.

The Pharisees' rivalry with Jesus reminds me of the jealousy and intrigue found in the movie *Amadeus*, the story of Mozart being frustrated by the mediocre Viennese musical establishment that ganged up against him. The Emperor's elite court musicians were threatened by the young Mozart's musical genius and did everything within their power to undercut and discredit him. Despite their conspiracies, two centuries later we remember and celebrate Mozart and not them.

Recently I've been reading Eric Metaxas' biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his colossal struggle against Hitler's Nazification of the German Church. Unfortunately too many German pastors took the loyalty oath to Hitler putting the Church subservient to the Nazi state. Reminiscent of the Viennese musical establishment's opposition to Mozart, the mediocre German church leaders were equally threatened by Bonhoeffer's obedience to Christ and his Gospel. In both cases it seemed like the power of the Establishment trumped beauty and truth as both of these young men didn't survive the struggle. But when you think about it, neither did Jesus, at least in the short term.

Which now brings us back to John's story of Jesus vs. the Pharisees. After the healing was thoroughly publicized, the Pharisees sprang into action only because it violated their Sabbath laws and traditions.

Immediately a debate broke out between the Pharisees, some arguing Jesus was not from God and others asking the spot-on question if Jesus was a sinner how could he miraculously heal a man blind from birth? Since there was division in the ranks and a united front was needed, the decision was made to change tactics and expose the healing as a hoax.

They interrogated the man, trying to get him to confess he was never blind even though everybody in the temple knew him for years. Bravely, the blind man refused to change his story saying only, "Jesus must be a prophet."

Next they hauled in the man's parents and tried to intimidate them into refuting their son's blindness, but fearing excommunication the parents kicked the can back to their son saying, "He's an adult, ask him."

With their religious systems facing an irreputable damage, they finally hauled the blind man back in to brow beat once him again, but this time the man became bold and spoke truth to power saying, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from and yet he opened my eyes. We know God doesn't listen to sinners but he does listen to one who...obeys his will...If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." (John 9:30-33)

Frustrated and angry all the Pharisees could do was to callously brand him a hopeless sinner, and then excommunicate him from the temple.

Notice that this man was acting as Jesus' proxy in the ensuing controversy, facing all by himself the full fury of the Pharisees' attacks. After the healing, Jesus left the scene unaware of the man's confrontation with the Pharisees, foreshadowing the near future after Christ's ascension, when the early Christians were left behind to fight the good fight of faith on Jesus' behalf.

At the end of the day, after hearing the Pharisees drove the man out of the temple Jesus went looking for him. Though it's not said, reading between the lines, Jesus had to be impressed with the man's courage and grace under fire, perhaps giving Jesus hope that there were some people "getting it" after all.

Jesus also wanted to let the man know his excommunication wasn't for nothing. Jesus asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man answered, "Who is he sir? Tell me so I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, the one speaking to you is he." The man responded, "Lord, I believe," and worshipped him. (John 35-38)

There are many themes and lessons we can draw from this story especially the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees. Afterward, hearing Jesus say, "I came into the world for judgment so that those who do not see may see and those who do see become blind," some Pharisees asked Jesus, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" (John 39-41)

The unsettling answer is, "If you have to ask, maybe you are." Truth is, we all have blind spots, keeping us from seeing Christ's light shining on our still dark corners.

Let's be honest. We don't want to see that our preconceived notions and opinions don't necessarily glorify but could instead be opposing God. We're afraid to see that maybe, just maybe, we're on the wrong side of an issue or, God forbid, maybe even unintentionally supporting something intrinsically evil and that's when we put on our old reliable blinders.

We tell our children, Jesus is the light of the world and his light is a good thing, but as adults, we need to warn each other that even though Jesus' light can threaten us, for our own sake we have to open our eyes and ask God to help us see and then handle the truth so we can be set free.

Every day, at least once, you and I are given the choice to either open or close our eyes to what God is up to. If the people of God are blind to the truth and refuse to wade into all the messiness and suffering in today's world, then the Church fails Christ and His Gospel.

But if we wake up, open our eyes to see God leading us back into the world to visit the sick, raise the dead and kick out demons, then God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven, and God's Kingdom comes nearer than you think.

As we come to Christ midway through Lent, open your eyes, look deep into the darkness within you, until you see Jesus, working hard to restore your sight, so like the once blind man, we too can worship and serve Jesus together, the same way he's already loving and serving us.