

*As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.*

*8The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" 9Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." 10But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." 12They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."*

*13They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." 16Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. 17So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." 18The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." 22His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 24So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." 25He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" 28Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.*

*35Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." 37Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." 38He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.*

*39Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." 40Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" 41Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.*

"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Jesus' answer? "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

I've thought that Jesus was saying that this guy's blindness was kind of a prop – God knew Jesus would need someone to heal that day – the man spent a whole infancy and childhood, adolescence and young adulthood

without sight just so Jesus could work this miracle. He was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. But I have never liked what that answer says about God.

But who am I to question God? I remember a woman who lived on a lonely ranch in the emptiness of the North Dakota prairie. As a young pastor I visited her once a month – took her communion. She suffered from arthritis and from a weary soul. Over and over she declared, “You just have to take what God gives you.” Five, ten, fifteen times in a single visit – “You have to take what God gives you.” She did not question God. But she had lived most of a lifetime - known what it was to be a bride, gave birth to a son, decorated her own home – still she only knew God as one who laid burdens upon her.

The blind beggar had never seen his mother's smile nor had he experienced the glory of a brilliant sunset. From the very beginning of life he had been deprived of the gift of sight.

He is not alone.

Think of most anything you can thank God for – there is probably a person who has never had whatever it is you give thanks for. The ability to breathe without effort, to hear, to have shelter, to be held by loving arms, to walk, to talk, to have enough to eat, to live without pain, to live in safety, to have parents, - thousands, even millions have not known these simple, precious gifts from God. From birth they have not known them.

Who is at fault for suffering that comes from the moment of birth – or that begins even before birth? Shall we blame Adam and Eve? Those who wreck the environment? The greed of those unwilling to share? God?

It feels like we need to blame someone for our hearts tell us it is not fair. But Jesus said of a man born blind, “He was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.”

Then Jesus healed him. God's work was revealed.

If the healing of physical blindness is what this story is about it should have ended there. But this story was just beginning. First, the neighbors tried to understand what had happened and the one who had made it happen, Jesus. Then the Pharisees got involved, the blind man's parents were questioned – the blind man himself was

questioned and thrown out because they did not like his openness to Jesus. Finally, Jesus came to the blind man and asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The blind man responded, “Who is he sir? Tell me that I may believe in him.” And Jesus responded, “You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he.”

“Lord, I believe,” was the blind man’s response.

One person in the whole story becomes a believer: The man born blind. Is this the work of God revealed in him – not the gift of his vision but the gift of faith?

I ask people when they have felt closest to God. Most always the answer tells of a time of suffering - serious sickness, the death of a loved one, loss of job. What a surprise it is that that is the answer! For this man born blind the moment when he was closest to God was not when his eyes first saw the light of day. No, he was drawn close to Jesus after all the opposition by neighbors, the abandonment of parents, the rejection by the Pharisees.

I do not think that God uses our suffering as the bait to hook us on faith. But in every situation God is working to fill us with faith in Christ. When we are strongest we may be the most resistant to God’s working in us. When we are weakest, most open.

I do not understand why some are born unlucky. But I hope that they will all experience the love of Jesus and believe in him. I hope the same for me and you. Amen.