

The story about the Man Born Blind in John's Gospel has grown to become one of my all-time favorite gospel passages. Most every time I hear Jesus' teachings, see his actions, and witness the journey of the unnamed man from blindness to faith, I find myself inspired by it all and moved by the incredible way that the gospel can speak to the world in any generation.

Reading the gospel this weekend is no exception. In fact, to me, this passage is eerily relevant for our times now.

Jesus and his disciples encounter the man blind from birth. The disciples ask Jesus, "Why?" Why is the man like this? Why does God allow this man to suffer? The disciples conclude, as many did at the time, that it must have something to do with sin. The man suffers because he or his parents did something bad. The thought goes that God punishes those who offend him; therefore, the man or his family must have somehow offended God.

But Jesus answers, "No." It does not have to do with the man's personal sins or his parents' personal sins. The man is born blind, Jesus tells them, so that "the works of God might be made visible through him." Jesus teaches his disciples that God permits bad things to happen so He can bring good from them. While that may seem uncaring on God's part, there is no clearer way to show God's power and love: when good seems impossible, God can and does act.

At this point, I hope that you can see how this applies to our modern moment.

We look at the spread of the virus. We see the elderly afflicted by the disease. We ponder on those who might lose their jobs. We witness the innocent die. We wonder how it impacts our own lives, forcing us to stay home or make significant changes to our routines. To all this we ask, "Why?" Why do bad things happen to good people? Why does God permit bad things to impact our world? Why does he allow the innocent to suffer and die?

We may be tempted to answer as the disciples did: God must be allowing us to suffer this way because humans have done something wrong. We have sinned against God in so many ways: killing the innocent in the womb; destroying the environment; objectifying others through pornography; ignoring the poor; the list seems endless. Therefore, God must be punishing us by allowing this virus to spread and infect our world.

I will not dispute the fact that we as humans have done some truly heinous things. But, if we want to be true to the gospel, then we have to recognize that God does not operate like that. Jesus teaches us that God does not punish sinfulness by sickness. Instead, He allows bad things to happen so as to bring good out of them. He shows his power and his love by doing what seems impossible: bringing light and new life out of night and death.

I am in no way saying that this teaching is easy for us simply to accept, though. I think that, in a real way, we find ourselves in the same place as the man born blind. We cannot "see" any other way for things to work out or get better. To us, the darkness seems permanent, and we feel like we will just have to live with it for the rest of our lives. We are blind and will be blind from now on, leaving us in darkness and uncertainty.

The thing about blindness, though, is that it can also be a profound symbol of what faith is like.

Consider the story again in John's Gospel: the man born blind does not stand as a symbol of sadness or uncertainty. He is not given to as an example of never-ending darkness or gloom. He is lifted up before us as a model of faith. Despite his blindness, he believed. Despite the pushback and the exclusion that he received from the Pharisees, he believed. Despite his own lack of knowledge about how he was healed, he believed.

His belief invites us to do the same.

My dear family, facing so many unknowns today, the gospel invites us to believe. Believe that God allows evil in the world not to punish us but to bring good out of it—a good that we may not be able even to imagine right now. Believe that Christ is in our world today, being “the light of the world.” Believe that our blindness is an opportunity to grow in faith in the One who can heal a man born blind.