

When things go wrong, like a baby born blind, a man reduced to begging on the street; when life brings unexpected and unwanted bad stuff, we have a human tendency to try to find a reason.

Today's gospel reading opens with the disciples asking that age-old question—why do bad things happen to people? They must have done something bad to deserve it, either the parents, or the man born blind (imagine a fetus going rogue, right?) We are quick to assign blame. Maybe it is a way of feeling safer: I would never be that bad, so I will never have something that bad happen to me. Often, it is a way of avoiding responsibility for caring for each other. Not my fault. Not my problem. Not my responsibility.

In matters of poverty, or job loss, or homelessness or sometimes still, even domestic violence, we hear the speculation: I wonder what she did to make him hit her. I wonder what he did to lose his job, why don't they manage their money better? Not my problem. Not my fault. Not my responsibility. It's hard to see that other people don't have as much control over life as we think they should; maybe because it reminds us that we don't have as much control over life as we like to think we do. If bad things can happen to others, maybe one day something really bad could happen to me.

Blindness is runs rampant in today's Gospel reading. Spiritual blindness. It begins with the disciples, looking for someone blame.

So, the man is healed, but then the neighbors have a hard time fitting what they thought they knew, with what has really happened. The neighbors of the now healed man simply can't take in what has happened. Surely this is not...they say. Can't be. They suspect a switch, a trick. It doesn't add up. The neighbors go to great lengths to **not** see what has happened. Because to them, it simply doesn't compute. They are looking right at it, but they can't even see it.

Another form of spiritual blindness. A lack of humility. If they don't understand it, can't explain it, it simply can't have happened. Their world is small. Their imagination, their capacity for wonder, stunted. But worst of all, they are arrogant. If we can't understand it, it mustn't be real, they seem to believe. In that attitude, they deny the healed man's reality. Worse yet, they deny the

healing power of God's grace. But the healed man, he tells it straight: I was blind and now I see. And that man, Jesus, he did it.

This is all too much for the Pharisees, the elite, powerful Pharisees. They can't stand that a peasant would dare make such a claim. Heresy, from the mouth of a beggar! How dare he! So they fall in line with the rest, with a spiritual blindness of their own. That a good man could break the Sabbath law and do a good thing—it doesn't compute. And besides, they have a lot on the line—their authority, their credibility, their power. So they can't admit that God isn't contained by their interpretation of law. They have made a common mistake, clinging to the letter of the law, rather than following the spirit of the law. But you know what they say, the devil is in the details.

This story will not end well, and in the end, an innocent man will die on a cross. So often, that is the fruit that our spiritual blindness bears. Innocent people suffer.

When, because we are afraid, we point fingers of blame. When, because we are arrogant, we chose not to see what happens before our very eyes. When, because we are morally lazy, we choose the letter of the law over the spirit of the law. When we engage in the kind of black and white thinking that can't, that won't, grasp a truth that is larger than our own; when we are spiritually blind, innocent people get hurt. Our own souls are hurt.

But, it doesn't have to be that way. We can grow in our understanding, in our humility, in our courage. Jesus said, seek and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened. Ask, and it will be given. Understanding can grow, the doors of our hearts opened, a greater wisdom found. Jesus came to give us this gift.

I think we are living in a time that is dark. We are fearful—of everything from losing our job, or our home, or our healthcare, to losing our planet to losing our democracy. We either fear immigrants, or we fear what will happen to them if we don't take them in. Out of our fear we point fingers, we seek someone to blame.

We are suspicious of what is truth—like the neighbors, we only see what already makes sense to us, and deny that anything else could be real. Like the blind man's neighbors, it didn't compute that this could be both the man that was

formerly blind, AND the man that can now see. So many times it is, for us, either/or, and so we fail to see the fullness of reality.

Like the Pharisees, we are protective of our familiar way of doing things. We get so focused on how we will do things, that we forget to think about why we are doing them. In our spiritual blindness, innocent people harmed. Every day, every minute of every day, Jesus is again nailed to the cross by the spiritual blindness the world.

As Christians, we are called to dwell not in the darkness, not to cower in spiritual blindness, but to receive the healing balm that makes us whole. To learn to see, for the sake of the world, and for the sake of our soul. This is what glorifies God.

Jesus said something intriguing right at the beginning of the Gospel we read this morning. Remember when the disciples asked why this bad thing had happened, and Jesus said to glorify God? That is kind of funky reason, but since we know God's purposes are loving, we are safe to think that it wasn't God who caused the man's blindness. Rather, Jesus using the healing to show us something of our own spiritual blindness. Suffering sometimes just happens. Darkness comes into the world, and waxes and wanes over history.

If we are children of light, if we want to walk as children of light, how we handle the suffering of others matters. And God is glorified, or not, by our own response to the suffering of the world.

I think Jesus doesn't want us to point fingers. I think Jesus wants instead for us to copy him, to reach out, to touch the suffering of others, and do what we can to provide the balm that they need. I think Jesus doesn't want us to ignore what is right before our very eyes. I think Jesus wants us to see it, and begin to include new, other, realities into our own understanding of what is real. I don't think Jesus cares one wit if we follow the letter of the law, as long as we follow the spirit of God's love. Jesus calls us to not only seek His light, but to, ourselves, burn ever more brightly with the light of his love. We do that as we learn to follow the way of humility, compassion and wisdom, of Jesus.

Now may be the most important time of our lifetime to do just that. Thanks be to God for the way of light, and life, that Jesus came to teach us.

AMEN