

John 9:1–7
Wed. of Laetare
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
March 13, 2024

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Why do bad things happen to good people? Philosophers have asked this question for quite some time. It's often used as a "gotcha" question against Christians. Unbelievers think they've found the one insurmountable hurdle for those who trust in the LORD: the problem of evil. Why do bad things happen to good people?

The thinking goes like this: "Christians believe God is all-powerful and perfectly good. But if something bad happens, then God is either not powerful enough to stop it, or worse, He doesn't care about what happens. That is, He's not good." That's how unbelievers often argue against the existence of God. The problem is that this way of thinking makes man the final judge over God. There's an arrogance to this reasoning that unbelievers are blinded to because they walk by sight rather than by faith. They can't see the things of God. They blaspheme our LORD and they scoff at His marvelous work.

As Jesus passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And the disciples asked Him: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Good question. If you recall, at our Ember Friday vespers at the Alte Kapelle, the reading was the healing of the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus then found him in the Temple and told him: "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you" (John 5:14). It almost sounds like there's a connection between the man's physical ailment and his sin. Or as the Close of the Commandments puts it, God punishes the children for the sin of the fathers. So as far as the

disciples were concerned, it very well could have been this blind man's personal sin or the sin of his parents that caused this man's blindness.

And in a general way, it's true! The wages of sin is death. You die because of sin and everything you suffer is a result of living in a fallen, sinful world. The original sin of Adam infected all his descendants born in the natural way and all creation. Children die because there's sin in the world. You get sick because of sin. People are born blind because of sin. Everything that's wrong in your life is the result of sin, whether your sin or that of another.

So who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus could have gone with the common pagan notion of the day that the man was born blind because of a future sin he might commit. Or he could say the man was conceived in sin, and blindness is the result. He could have blamed the government for not providing enough social welfare programs, or society for making life difficult for the handicapped. He could have blamed chance, fate, the luck of the draw or anything really.

People play this same game today, with themselves and others. Why do I have these health problems? Why am I fat? Why am I bald? Why am I single? Why am I married? Why do I have this job? Why do children die of cancer? Why is there war? Why did these people die in an earthquake? In short: Why do bad things happen to good people?

Jesus could say: "Well, nobody's really good, you know. Everyone's a sinner." Or he could have said: "That's just the way life is." Or He could have blamed the blind man or the blind man's parents, but instead Jesus says: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in Him." The disciples are asking about causes. What is the cause of this man's blindness? Something he did? Or something his parents did? Well, as we already said, the cause of everything wrong is sin. But that's not where Jesus goes with this

and it's not where we always need to go either. Jesus was asked about causes, but He answers in terms of purpose. The question shouldn't always be: "why is this bad thing happening in my life?" The question should be: "How is God using this for His glory?" Sometimes the causes of an issue we're having can be recognized and changed, but often, we simply have to sit back and see how God is going to act.

You can understand this clearly in terms of Jesus Himself. When our LORD suffered and died on the cross, anyone could have naturally asked: "Who sinned, this man or his parents that He suffers in this way? Well, Jesus is suffering for the sins of His fathers, for the accumulated sins going all the way back to the beginning and all the way forward to the end of time. Jesus suffered for the sins of the fathers and the children. Jesus suffered for all sin in general and for your sin in particular. Every sin you commit is a cause of our Lord's suffering and death. But Jesus isn't looking at the cause. He's looking at the purpose. We know the cause of the crucifixion. We sing: "Yet, O Lord, not thus alone Make me see Your passion, But its cause to me make known and its termination. Ah! I also and my sin Wrought Your deep affliction; This indeed the cause has been Of your crucifixion" (LSB 440).

The cause of Jesus's death is sin, your sin. Jesus, however, emphasizes not the cause but the purpose. Your sin and the sin of the whole world caused His death, but the purpose was to forgive your sins and bring you life and salvation in Him. In light of the purpose of Christ's death, the causes are overshadowed. The victory swallows up the defeat. Life destroys death. The light overcomes the darkness in Jesus Christ our Lord. The purpose, or the final cause, overshadows the other causes.

Jesus then says of Himself and God the Father: "We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work." As Jesus said earlier: "My

Father is working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17). Jesus brings in the theme of light and darkness, which fits perfectly for this situation with a man born blind, a man who only knows darkness and not light. Jesus says: “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Jesus is with us always, even unto the end of the age. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” The light of Jesus Christ enlightens those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death. In His life, as members of His Body, we have light, enlightenment, understanding concerning the things of God while the unbelieving world remains in darkness

After Jesus said these things, He spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then He anointed the man’s eyes with the mud and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. Jesus doesn’t necessarily need to use the mud or the washing. Elsewhere, His Word is enough to heal people. But Jesus could use mud and washing to teach us something about who He is and how He works. Jesus is God and He likes to work through means.

The entire Gospel of John points us back to the beginning, back to creation. You see that from the first verses of the book: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” This is a reflection of Genesis 1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” The Gospel of John consistently reflects creation. You also see that with the light and life themes so prominent in our text, and with the mud.

On the sixth day, God took dust of the earth, a lump of clay, to form a body and God breathed into that body the breath of life. Adam became a living creature. On Ash Wednesday we were reminded that as man, as descendants of Adam, you are dust and to dust you shall return.

Here, Jesus, the architect of creation, takes the material of creation, the dust, and places it upon the blind man's eyes for healing. Jesus is restoring the damaged creation. He's bringing it back to the place it ought to be. When Jesus places mud on the blind man's eyes, He's showing that the one who created man is also the one to redeem man from all his sins and diseases. Jesus is the creator who would restore us to life by way of His death. Jesus is teaching us about who He is.

Jesus is also showing us that He likes to work through means, or instruments. He could've said the word and made it so, but the spit and the mud in the eyes become a tangible and visible reminder that God is not just working on some ethereal, spiritual, transcendent level. God is working right here and right now in the universe He created. He made everything in love and He loves to be involved in the creation He's made, like a child playing in the sandbox. He didn't make creation and then step away. He's actively involved in preserving and restoring what He made and He uses physical solutions to physical problems.

You can also see this when Jesus tells the man to go wash in the pool of Siloam. The miracle could've happened in other ways, had our LORD so desired. But He chose washing to teach us something. The mud in the eyes refers to creation and the washing in the pool call to mind the restoration we are given in the waters of Holy Baptism. There's nothing special about the water of Siloam in particular. It's the command of Christ that takes ordinary water and makes it a purifying water. In Baptism we ask: "How can water do such great things?"

Certainly not just water, but the Word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's Word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of new birth in the Holy Spirit.

The water is plain and ordinary water until God attaches His Word and promise to that water. Go and wash. With the command of Christ, the water becomes a life-giving water. The

blind man trusts His Lord and receives all the benefits the Lord has connected to that washing. So it goes with Holy Baptism. In Baptism, we don't use the purest spring water or some special water from the Jordan river or holy water. We don't even use distilled water. We use the ordinary tap water you drink. But the Word of God takes that water and makes it a life-giving vehicle, a washing of regeneration. A washing of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit. The blind man washes and so he sees. Baptism separates us from the unbelieving world and gives us the eyes of faith, that we might truly see and understand the things of God.

If you look at the very end of John 9, you'll see that Jesus has this spiritual vision in mind when He performs the physical miracle of healing the man born blind from birth. Some of the Pharisees ask if they are blind. Jesus says: "Now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains. Seeing or not seeing in this spiritual sense is tied to belief or unbelief. As the man who was blind from birth, so too were you born spiritually blind and an enemy of God. Adam's blindness is hereditary. It's passed on to you. But Jesus opens your eyes. Jesus re-creates you. He washes you and He gives you new eyes in Baptism that you might see Jesus Christ, the one Sent from the Father to give His life for you. Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then, in the new heavens and the new earth, we will see face to face (1 Cor 13:12). In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Magnificat.