

May 6, 2018    The Mystery    John 9:1-12

We need to remember every time that we turn to the Gospel of John we are reading an account that was written by Jesus best friend. The code words that reveal that fact to us are “the disciple whom Jesus loved”. To put that in perspective: Jesus chose out of the band of followers he had, 12 whom he labored to teach and to train, so that the work of the Kingdom of God would not stop when HE was gone. Within that group there were three who were especially close to Jesus...Peter, James, and John. And within that trio there was one who was, we would say, best friend. Jesus did not advertise that fact, but when Jesus was dying on the cross there was one friend, one follower, one disciple to whom he committed the care of HIS mother Mary. It was John.

John tells us that Jesus and the disciples were walking. It seems according to all 4 of the Gospels, a lot of the teaching that was aimed directly at the development of the 12 happened as they and Jesus were walking along the roads from village to village and town to town. In this instance as they went along Jesus saw a man that had been blind from birth. He was probably begging by the roadside. A man who could not work because he could not see. He has few alternatives. And then as in our own times this raises questions. It is a mystery to the disciples why such things should occur.

Standard Jewish teaching on this subject is that God is good, and holy, perfect in every way. So the question that is asked by the disciples begins with the accepted wisdom that God does not make bad things happen. The obvious explanation is that sin is involved. The question put by the disciples is the question we ask when things happen that we simply cannot understand. Why did young people die at intersection of western roads on the way to a hockey game? Why did innocent, hard working people, walking on the sidewalk on Young Street become victims of a driver's rage. It is the mystery of evil that the disciples are asking about here. “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (vs 2 of John 9). It is the mystery of why do bad things happen to good people. The disciples like us find that hard to accept and even harder to understand. The question is framed in the only terms they can begin to use in their culture...who sinned? Who is God punishing here? What has caused the judgement of God to fall so unmercifully on this man and his extended family?

Jesus response reframes the whole discussion. We in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are likely to find ourselves immediately asking another question. How does Jesus know this? Jesus says, “Neither the man who is blind nor his parents sinned.” In other words, the cause of this man's being blind was not someone's sinful deed. This is not a case of God's punishing someone for their sin. And Jesus goes on to say something far more dramatic and daring. “This happened,” that is, his parents had a child and that child was born blind, unable to see for a very different reason; namely, “that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”

Several things need to be said at once. First, how can Jesus know that? I will rephrase my own question. By what authority does Jesus make this declaration? It is surely the authority

of Jesus as the one and only Son of God. He knows the Father's will, for HIS life, and the lives of those the Father has given HIM, (the disciples) and those who cross HIS path. Jesus is claiming something we have seen before. Nothing happens by chance. God's grace and mercy are revealed in the details of daily living. Every circumstance is grist for the revealing of Jesus nature, and by extension the touching of lives by the mercy, the love, of the one, good and gracious God.

Second. The man born blind is about to receive sight. This is a special moment for him. Not only will he receive the gift of sight, he is about to become one of the witnesses that the kingdom of God is revealed singularly, uniquely in Jesus, what he says, and what he does.

Third. The disciples put their question to Jesus anticipating that HE would have wisdom to share about the matter. Where they asked about sin and the judgement of God, Jesus answer casts the light on God's mercy and HIS life altering love. The disciples are also about to find themselves as witnesses of things they did not foresee and did not expect. That means, whether they understand it or not, the blind man's life is about to change in his receiving sight. The disciples' lives are also about to change. John's life is about to change because they as a group and he as an individual are never going to be able to deny they saw what happened here. They heard what Jesus said. They saw what Jesus did. And they saw the results...that the man who was born blind came home seeing, simply because he obeyed the instructions Jesus gave him. In this matter of his blindness, the blind man treated Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Notice the details of the episode. Jesus said to the disciples "I am the light of the world." He was preparing them for what they were about to witness. What did they see? It is a strange ritual in which Jesus engages. HE spits on the ground. HE bends down and mixes his saliva with the dust in the road and makes mud. HE approaches the blind man and smears the mud on the man's eyes. Then Jesus says to the man, "Go and wash this mud off in the waters of the Pool of Siloam. Siloam means sent John tells us. Jesus sent the man to the Pool named Sent. Born blind, the man gets to Siloam, washes in the waters Jesus sent him to, and he comes home seeing. Not only that, not only are the disciples witnesses to this mystery, but his neighbours and those who had seen him begging by the road side get involved. There is controversy! Some of them say "Isn't this the blind man who was begging? Some say yes it is. Some say, It couldn't be he just looks like him! But the man who has been healed insists, I am that man.

This really gets interesting. In the midst of the controversy.... (he is the man that was blind, Nope, he just looks like that man,) they all want to know, "How then were your eyes opened? The one thing that there is no doubt about is that this man can see! And he testifies. The man they call Jesus made some mud. He put it on my eyes. He sent me to the Pool of Siloam, and I washed off the mud. And then I could see!! There is one more detail these neighbours and acquaintances want to know. "Where is this man they call Jesus?" What does the blind man who can now see reply? "I don't know." Jesus was walking down the road when met the man. He has moved on.

Notice this. John is certain of what happened because he knows what he witnessed. The man who was born blind is certain. Jesus put mud on his eyes, sent him to wash, and he can see. To him it is that simple and that dramatic. His life has changed radically. All because he obeyed the man they and we call Jesus. Do I understand what happened? I understand this: Jesus changes lives. I say HE is the Son of God because it makes sense to me that only God can do what Jesus did. Do I understand? No, I believe. I believe, because I have seen what I have seen, read what I have read and experienced what I have experienced. I have more reason to believe than I have not to. But there is a piece of this that will always be a mystery....because God is really involved, with that man born blind, with me, with you.

And of course, according to John the disciple, first hand witness, this portion is not the whole story, it is just the beginning. Next Sunday we will look at chapter 2 of the mystery.

Let us Pray;

In shady green pastures so rich and so sweet, God leads his dear children along.  
Where the water's cool flow bathes the weary one's feet. God leads His dear children along.  
Some through the waters, some through the flood, Some through the fire, but all through the blood.

Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song, in the night season and all the day long.

Lord Jesus, continue to lead your dear children along the road of faith. Amen