

**March 30, 2014**

**John 9: 1-41**

<sup>1</sup>Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?”

<sup>3</sup>Jesus said, “You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. <sup>4</sup>We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. <sup>5</sup>For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world’s Light.”

<sup>6</sup>He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man’s eyes, <sup>7</sup>and said, “Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam” (Siloam means “Sent”). The man went and washed—and saw.

<sup>8</sup>Soon the town was buzzing. His relatives and those who year after year had seen him as a blind man begging were saying, “Why, isn’t this the man we knew, who sat here and begged?”

<sup>9</sup>Others said, “It’s him all right!”

But others objected, “It’s not the same man at all. It just looks like him.”

He said, “It’s me, the very one.”

<sup>10</sup>They said, “How did your eyes get opened?”

<sup>11</sup>“A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ I did what he said. When I washed, I saw.”

<sup>12</sup>“So where is he?”

“I don’t know.”

<sup>13</sup>They marched the man to the Pharisees. <sup>14</sup>This day when Jesus made the paste and healed his blindness was the Sabbath. <sup>15</sup>The Pharisees grilled him again on how he had come to see. He said, “He put a clay paste on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see.”

<sup>16</sup>Some of the Pharisees said, “Obviously, this man can’t be from God. He doesn’t keep the Sabbath.”

Others countered, “How can a bad man do miraculous, God-revealing things like this?” There was a split in their ranks.

<sup>17</sup>They came back at the blind man, “You’re the expert. He opened *your* eyes. What do you say about him?”

He said, “He is a prophet.”

<sup>18</sup>The Jews didn’t believe it, didn’t believe the man was blind to begin with. So they called the parents of the man now bright-eyed with sight. <sup>19</sup>They asked them, “Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? So how is it that he now sees?”

<sup>19</sup>They asked them, “Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? So how is it that he now sees?”

<sup>20</sup>His parents said, “We know he is our son, and we know he was born blind. <sup>21</sup>But we don’t know how he came to see—haven’t a clue about who opened his eyes. Why don’t you ask him? He’s a grown man and can speak for himself.” <sup>22</sup>(His parents were talking like this because they were intimidated by the Jewish leaders, who had already decided that anyone who took a stand

that this was the Messiah would be kicked out of the meeting place. <sup>23</sup>That's why his parents said, "Ask him. He's a grown man.")

<sup>24</sup>They called the man back a second time—the man who had been blind—and told him, "Give credit to God. We know this man is an impostor."

<sup>25</sup>He replied, "I know nothing about that one way or the other. But I know one thing for sure: I was blind ... I now see."

<sup>26</sup>They said, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

<sup>27</sup>"I've told you over and over and you haven't listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you so eager to become his disciples?"

<sup>28</sup>With that they jumped all over him. "You might be a disciple of that man, but we're disciples of Moses. <sup>29</sup>We know for sure that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man even comes from."

<sup>30</sup>The man replied, "This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes! <sup>31</sup>It's well known that God isn't at the beck and call of sinners, but listens carefully to anyone who lives in reverence and does his will. <sup>32</sup>That someone opened the eyes of a man born blind has never been heard of—ever. <sup>33</sup>If this man didn't come from God, he wouldn't be able to do anything."

<sup>34</sup>They said, "You're nothing but dirt! How dare you take that tone with us!" Then they threw him out in the street.

<sup>35</sup>Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him. He asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

<sup>36</sup>The man said, "Point him out to me, sir, so that I can believe in him."

<sup>37</sup>Jesus said, "You're looking right at him. Don't you recognize my voice?"

<sup>38</sup>"Master, I believe," the man said, and worshiped him.

<sup>39</sup>Jesus then said, "I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind."

<sup>40</sup>Some Pharisees overheard him and said, "Does that mean you're calling us blind?"

<sup>41</sup>Jesus said, "If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you're accountable for every fault and failure."

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

**THANKS BE TO GOD!**

### **Sermon – "Christi-anarchy"**

The church in the time of John, in the late 1<sup>st</sup> Century and the early 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, was a place where the theology was particularly nasty. A disability, whatever it was, and if you think back to your knowledge of your stories of Jesus, the kind of people he hangs around with are the ones who for reason of disability, or gender or culture have been pointed to as bearers of sin. The understanding perpetuated in the Jewish faith at that time that these disabilities were the price exacted by God on you or on your children, or on your children's children and they were done to appease an angry vengeful God. When something bad happens to someone, we say "What

did you do to deserve that?" It can be incredibly hurtful to have people assume that you must have done something to make God mad, to cause this unhappiness in your life.

This is further proof of the legalism Patrick spoke about last Sunday, the meaning of the cross, the meaning of the death of Jesus, for Christians in a lot of circles today is that God killed Jesus to make up for our sins. That was the only way to make things even with God. We had committed the crime - Jesus had to pay the punishment. It's unbiblical. When you look at this passage, the question is, was the man blind because of sin? But if we look at this passage in the light of how Jesus behaves through the interrogation and confrontation, we learn about the true meaning of the cross. He disavows the connection between sin and human suffering, he deals with the man, and he sees the suffering and makes it better. He takes away the bling and takes rule-breaking off the table and he says my task here is not to point fingers; my task here is to heal suffering. Jesus encounters the blind man and his suffering and his response is the divine impulse and that is to heal; to make things right.

Derek Flood reflects in his book on these diametrically opposed views of the atonement, it's that loaded theological word about the meaning of the cross and the nature of God's grace. And this is what he says "Of all sins the sin of abusive authority is particularly dangerous because it masquerades as righteousness, claiming to speak for God. History is crimson stained with examples of how abusive religious and political authority has been used to justify war, torture, and oppression – all in the name of God and justice. Exposing these false authorities is a central focus of how Christus Victor frames the work of Christ." So the temple leaders pointing their finger at the blind man and at Jesus, daring to heal on the Sabbath are a lot like a hamster on a wheel. They run and run around and are still in the cage when they're done. Flood goes on to argue that this death trap of guilt is not what God desires. Always seeking blame, always pointing out rule breaking, is not what God desires. It is what Christ has come to save us from. These false Gods of condemnation, guilt, legalism, self-hatred and abuse are the unmerciful judges who will not let go of their hold on us. The accuser, the father of lies, the condemner, are the ones who demand satisfaction. To make it simple, if we have a God who is always angry at us, a God who is always needing to exact punishment because of our imperfections. That's not much of a God to worship. Yet in many ways we have perpetuated this belief. It has made people feel guilty, whether you have a disability, oppressed, or depressed. Adding on to those experiences by making people feel ashamed because they are sinful, snuffs out the very light that Jesus told that blind man he came to bring to the world. The purpose of Jesus is not to darken our lives but to enlighten them, hence we are slowing moving through Lent, lightening our sanctuary.

So this is what Derek Flood calls "Christi-anarchy." Anarchy means lawlessness and is often connoted with chaos, confusion and disorder. What Flood means is that Jesus brought in a kind of anarchy to the status-quo of his time, to this perpetuation of a belief that God was an angry God and God had to be appeased? So there was always this sense of sin and punishment that seemed to perpetuate the faith of the people. That is very much the belief that has filtered through the Christian church over time. I've certainly heard it through my life when crummy stuff happened to me. We will carefully point out cause and effect and Christi-anarchy is

throwing all that law stuff out the window. When Derek Flood did his in-depth study of scripture, particularly the book of Romans, he came to the conclusion that if you were to say anything about the life and ministry of Jesus, it is that he defied the religious laws again and again, he was a rule breaker. He was one who subverted the system that existed in his time. He stood up to this toxic religious institution of his time that had become hurtful and judgmental, but he didn't meet their vileness with more of the same, he confounded them. The worst thing someone can do when someone's angry at you is to be nice back. This rebel God, and remember Jesus is God, all of this that we are doing in these weeks of Lent is calling us to remember that Jesus is God and not something separate. This rebel God did not meet evil and violence with more of the same, he did something even more disempowering for his enemies – he loved them. He was nice and accepting of them, he healed people. He tried to restore relationships, and he confounded them with kindness and it drove them crazy, crazy enough to the cross.

Flood explains what he means by Christi-anarchy, I believe in that rebel God, I believe in Christi-anarchy, that is, I believe in the subversive way of Jesus, characterized by compassion, grace, non-violence and restorative justice. I don't believe in that way because it is easy, or because it comes naturally to me, it certainly doesn't. Nor do I believe in it simply because some book tells me I have to. I'm well aware that blindly following rules (even if they are good rules like forgiveness and self-sacrifice) means they can be misunderstood and misapplied, and thus become hurtful. So I want to go in with both eyes open. I believe in that way because I have seen how grace and enemy love have radically transformed my own life, and my relationships. I've seen its power to heal our broken world firsthand. After it changed my heart, and changed my life, I couldn't help but let it change my mind.

This young film-maker and artist who didn't expect, I think, to have a great religious and spiritual awakening... did. He challenges us in the darkness of a world of finger-pointing, blame, punishment and ridicule to hear anew Jesus' words "I am the world's light." Jesus broke most, if not all, of the religious rules of his time. He stood up to the leadership that embodied those rules, tried to manage people by intimidation, shame and guilt. He demonstrated how legalism is a moral cul-de-sac – it gets you no-where on the road to God.

Robert Hoch that teaches preaching at Dubuque Presbyterian Seminary. In his commentary on this passage from John says that the challenge of this text will be to frame the sermon in such a way that the congregation participates in the deconstruction of commonly held views or opinions about the human condition. Views that can be reinforced by deep-seated fears. Our journey to the cross is a deconstruction of long-held views and I think misconceptions about the ministry of Jesus. Christi-anarchy, following the example of Jesus, means to deconstruct those beliefs and practices that traditionally hurt and destroy us and other Christians, in our relationship with God.

Another person who studied this passage, made a stamper who is a reformed church pastor in England, said that this is fundamentally a story about grace. And the blind man sums it up beautifully for all of us, when he says "One thing I do know, that tho I was blind now I see."

Light is the central message of the cross. Light and understanding about grace is the message of atonement or punishment but as one who faced all of that from religious and political authorities, faced all of it with healing, understanding, comfort with the renewal and restoration of our relationship with God. AMEN