

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus and His disciples stroll along and see a blind man. The disciples show their lack of understanding through their curiosity, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” This was the only sense they could make of this man’s suffering. Someone was responsible. Someone was to blame. They were reaping what they sowed. The disciples believed that somehow, in his mother’s womb, this man sinned in such a way as to earn God’s wrath. Or, since God threatens in the appendix to the First Commandment, “I will punish the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me,” it could’ve been his parents who displeased God, and so he suffered.

It’s true. Sin has consequences. We confess we deserve temporal and eternal punishment. Temporal punishments can be in response to a specific sin, a natural consequence that follows our behavior. If you go out drinking and get behind the wheel, you might crash and break your leg. That’s temporal punishment. But temporal punishments also come from the general condition of living in a fallen world. We still see and feel the effects of the pandemic medically, emotionally, financially, and so on. We also see wars, droughts, earthquakes, and the like inflicting the world. Instead of assessing the reason for suffering in each instance, we should heed all such things as cause for repentance. There is not one of us here who doesn’t need at any given moment to turn away from our sin and turn toward Jesus.

And yet, Jesus says God’s wrath isn’t the answer. There is another reason for suffering. “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” The disciples were asking the right question but in the wrong way. They wanted to know who was at fault, but Jesus invited them to consider the purpose. Why? “That the works of God might be displayed in him.” We might consider his blindness as part of the general condition of living in a fallen, corrupted world. And moments ago, the Jews were ready to stone Jesus for claiming to be God. But now Jesus is about to back up that claim by doing what only God can do, restoring what our fallen condition has corrupted.

So we may receive suffering, affliction, trial, and hardship as a general call to repentance. But we don’t get stuck as the disciples did in the blame game. We don’t get caught up in asking why. That’s mostly a useless exercise. Knowing whom to blame won’t do you any good, even if there is someone to blame. Instead, when you suffer, turn to faith. Look toward the promised end of your suffering. Don’t ask what you or someone did to deserve this, but ask, “what will God make of this? How will it glorify Him?” And trust that God is using it for good, whether you receive a specific answer or not.

This shift in perspective changes everything. It invites you to live your life knowing that God is at work even in the midst of your suffering. He’s at work to bless you and others through you. Sometimes we must wait for the light of eternity to see that blessing, but it’s coming. We know this because we know the one who promises that it is for the glory of God. All that happens in the world around us, good and bad, bane and blessing, God is working it together for our good toward that day when Christ returns. This is what Paul means, not that we won’t suffer, but that we trust in the goodness of God when we do suffer. We can rejoice in our sufferings because God is using them for good.

Jesus says, “We must work the works of him who sent me while it’s day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I’m in the world, I am the light of the world.” Notice His shift to “we.” It is still the work of God, but He pulls the disciples in. They were content being spectators, passing by a blind beggar and speculating on the cause of his misery. But now they are pulled into the story of Jesus, who comes to work. That work includes opening eyes that are blind in more ways than one. Night is coming, Jesus says, when no one can work. That night does come later in John’s Gospel when we cannot join Jesus but can only watch as He alone performs God’s work of redemption in the dark. They must therefore work while He is with them, showing, guiding, and enlightening them.

But the weeping of that night turned into the joy of the morning so that Jesus brings His light to us, too, here and now, that we too may work with Him. Having said these things, Jesus spat on the ground to

make mud. He anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So the man went and washed and came back seeing. Notice Jesus spits on the ground, softening it into mud, working with it, shaping it around the man's eyes. Do you see what's happening? The God who formed the man from the dust of the ground in Genesis 2 is now in the flesh forming new eyes from the dust of the ground for this man. But these new eyes Jesus gives are not opened until he goes and washes in the pool of Siloam, which means *Sent*. So he goes to wash in the waters to which he was sent, and for the first time in his life, he sees! He sees and joy overflows. Jesus sends you and me to water where we can go in absolutely blind but come out seeing.

What follows is an amazing transformation. This man, born blind, has not only gained physical sight but grows in spiritual sight. He returns seeing and is questioned, first by neighbors and then by religious authorities. He can see for the first time the look on their faces: confusion, fear, anger, hate, and division. All over the man who brought him sight. No, not just a man; a man of God, a prophet. Others, too, believe this man is from God. How could a sinner do such things? But it appears that those who doubt, who believe this Jesus to be a sinner and fraud, have prevailed. They have shouted down the truth because they don't want to believe. They don't want to reckon with the truth of Jesus.

And when the moment of truth comes, when it is demanded the man to disown the One who healed him, he now finds himself as a disciple. He knows what's at stake. He knows that even though he's gained his sight he will lose everything else. Still, he has become convinced of where Jesus comes from, that He is indeed from God. He has seen the light, the glory of God. Yet, now having confessed Jesus, he finds himself even more isolated than when he was a blind beggar. But he'd rather suffer it all to throw his lot in with Jesus, the One who opens the eyes of the blind to see.

Jesus heard they had cast him out, and having found him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" He knew Jesus' word was true. He was eager to hear and believe whatever Jesus had to say. Jesus answered, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." The man replied, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. Jesus said what the man was already beginning to believe. Having come to faith, he knew that Jesus would not abandon him and would not leave him alone in his sufferings.

The world cannot see Jesus for who he is, the Son of Man. So they turn to who they believe has the answers, just as the people went to the Pharisees to understand how the man came back seeing. The experts answered, "This Jesus is a sinner, a fraud." But the man was able to see and able to endure because he had been given the eyes to see that in Jesus he has all he ever needed.

We, too, have been given eyes to see Jesus. Through our baptismal faith, the waters to which Jesus sent us to wash, we can see Jesus as the Son of Man, the Savior of the world. And as His disciple, we learn to see the truth, past all the false and empty words of the world. We learn to see ever more clearly the more time we spend with Jesus, worshiping Him, attending to His Word, studying it, pondering it, and marveling at it. The more we spend with Jesus in His Word, the more clearly we see everything through His light. We begin to see even our own sufferings not as something to fear but as something that displays the glory of God in our lives, now and forever.

And so we see the world around, looking back with confusion, fear, anger, hate, and division. Even so, we can see the love of Christ prevailing, knowing that He has not abandoned us, left us alone to suffer, but rather know that even in all this He is working all things for our good. Even in suffering, we see the One who suffered for us, the One who was crucified and died in our place; even more, has risen to give us new life. He is working all things for His glory and our good. Christ suffered abandonment and isolation on the cross, working alone in the night when no one else could so that you and I can have the blessing of His eternal day. And even if our suffering were to end our lives, that too, God would work for His glory as our salvation draws ever near when He will not only restore sight but make all things new on the Last Day. Amen.