

Lent 4A  
St. John 9:1-41  
March 26, 2017  
St. George's Church Bolton  
Fr. Chris

## Blind—But Now I See!

*“As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.’”*

Is illness rooted in sin? Is our sickness caused as a result of being punished for bad things we have done in the past? Many see in illness a cause for blame, shame and guilt, all of which make healing harder!

When I catch a cold, I often blame myself, saying ‘I didn’t drink enough orange juice,’ or ‘I have been run down lately working too hard or staying out so late.’ These are ways I rationalize and blame myself for the bad cold I have. How about you? I would never think of sourcing the cause to someone who coughed near me in the store without covering their mouth.

Sometimes this game gets more serious with the seriousness of the illness. Blame gives us a sense of control over the chaos and unpredictability of life. If I can blame my lung cancer on my smoking, which may likely be the case, the cancer does not seem so random, and random things are fearful not only to their victims, but to those around you who love you and witness the effects of disease and decline.

When we get sick, especially when it is more serious, the big question is *why?* Why me? Why now? Why did this have to happen to me? Why am I being punished for something I did so long ago? Why? Actually, the better question here is, *why not me?*

Jesus removes the blame in this Gospel passage. Sickness, disability, death and dying are not punishments: they are a part of life. Sickness is random. Calamity happens chaotically. There is no rhyme or reason. No amount of searching for a cause to blame will change them. There is no answer to the question, *why?* This is hard to accept. We want to make ourselves important enough to God and to ourselves to have an answer to that *why* question.

More importantly, sickness does not demand repentance for a sin that we have drawn a tenuous connection to. At the time of Jesus, people not only looked to their own wrongdoings as a cause of sickness, but they also blamed sin as an inherited commodity, so that if your parents sinned, that could cause your illness. When the blind man comes before the Jewish authorities this morning, they said: “...*You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us? And they threw him out.*” Imagine gazing upon an infant and labeling it “*steeped in sin!*” Not only is this harsh, it is wrong and unfair. Go into a neonatal unit in a children’s hospital today and start spreading that toxic venom and *you* will get tossed out.

This is an incredible turning point in our understanding of ourselves and our God. We do not live under a dark cloud of the sins of the past, and there is always the opportunity for forgiveness. Our punishment will not come through illness.

Ah, but you say, 'some illness *is caused* by our *past behaviors* and choices. The alcoholic runs the risk of liver and other disease. The person who has sex with multiple partners runs the risk of STD's and the smoker of course, lung, stomach, and intestinal cancers. And those who regularly over eat open themselves to other maladies. To this I ask you, how many today would call a smoker, an alcoholic, an overeater, a sex addict, a *sinner*? Have we not learned to understand addiction as an illness itself that overtakes, rather than the cause of some moral deficiency on the part of its victims?

Try calling a smoker a sinner. Try judging an alcoholic as a moral reprobate. It doesn't work, and casts more aspersions on the people who assign such judgment on others. There are plenty of those kinds of people walking around in this world, and they are not pretty. It is always so easy to look down upon others and cast aspersions upon them. It is always so easy to wield the sharp sword of judgment, carving out and uncovering the sins and faults and mistakes of others, when the real question is always, *what about your own?*

Indeed, such focus ought to be on my own sins, and my own work at repentance for them. We punish ourselves more than any disease could do with our low opinions of ourselves and our pond bottom, lower than low self-esteem. Drag that around for a while and you will have more than scrapes on your knees!

Ironically, the real blindness in today's Gospel isn't that of the man born blind. "*Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.'* Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, '*What? Are we blind too?*' Jesus said, '*If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you*

*Claim you can see, your guilt remains.* "What, are we, blind too? Yes. They suffer from a moral blindness. They suffer from a blindness that prevents them from seeing the person in front of them and showing compassion upon them. They are blind to compassion, forgiveness and love. They only have passions, fears, *giveness* and hatred. These are far more troubling illnesses which lead to real death.

Sight is such a special gift. It enables us to appreciate the world we live in with all its wonder and beauty. It helps us navigate through it. It allows us to see others around us and love them as we have been loved. Sight allows us to appreciate how close God is to us, as we glimpse God in the wonderful creation all around us.

Imagine a life lived in darkness, without this gift you know so well. Many choose not to see the world in which they live, but live in a darkness in which they see only what they wish to see and they attempt to control how they see it. These are they who are deaf to others and deaf to the truth because they either don't want to hear it or they can't. Seeing that others have the same needs as you do and then doing something about it is 20/20 spiritual vision. And I don't mean seeking only to meet your own needs.

The odd thing is seeing does not require eyesight. God can heal and lift the blindness in our hearts and in our souls. I was blind, but now I see. I was not able to love, but now I can. I was mired and wallowing in my sins, but now I have hope.

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*would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see,  
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I only hope I have helped you see the meaning of the Gospel  
this morning. AMEN.