

On Seeing

4th Sunday in Lent

John 9:1-7

One of the most memorable books I remember reading with my parents as a child is titled, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. From the moment Alexander wakes up things just don't go Alexander's way. As he gets up, the gum that was in his mouth the night before winds up in his hair. When he gets out of bed, he trips on the skateboard and drops his sweater into the sink while the water was running. At breakfast, Alexander's brothers, Anthony and Nick reach into their cereal boxes and find amazing prizes, while Alexander ends up with just cereal.

On the way to school, he doesn't get the window seat in the carpool. At school, his teacher, Mrs. Dickens, doesn't like his picture of the invisible castle (which is actually just a blank sheet of paper), criticizes him for singing too loud, and leaving out 16 when he counts. His friend, Paul, deserts him for his third best friend and there is no dessert in his lunch bag. At the dentist, Dr. Fields tells Alexander he has a cavity, the elevator door closes on his foot, his brother Anthony pushes him in the mud, while his brother Nick says he is a crybaby for crying, and Mom punishes him for trying to punch Nick.

At the shoe store, they're sold out of Alexander's choice of sneakers (blue ones with red stripes), so Mom has to buy him plain white sneakers, which he refuses to wear. At Dad's office, Alexander makes a mess of things when he fools around with everything there (the copying machine, the books, and the telephone), getting to the point where his Dad tells him not to pick him up from work anymore.

At home, the family has lima beans for dinner (which he hates), there is kissing on TV (which he also hates), bath time becomes a nightmare (too much hot water, soap in his eyes, and losing a marble down the drain) and he has to wear his railroad train pajamas (he hates his railroad train pajamas). At bedtime, his nightlight burns out, he bites his tongue, Nick takes back a pillow, and the family cat chooses to sleep with Anthony. Throughout the book, Alexander mentions that he wants to move to Australia. The book ends with Mom's assurance that everybody has bad days, even people who live in Australia. We should note that In the Australian and New Zealand versions he wants to move to Timbuktu, not Australia (Summary adapted from Wikipedia.org).

The book is memorable to me because it is so relatable. I would like to slap that label on days sometimes—terrible, horrible, no good, and very bad. Don't you have days like that sometimes? You just want to throw your hands in the air, tilt your head back, look heavenward and ask, "What did I do to deserve this?" Sometimes when things do not seem to be going the way we want or expect, our first impulse is to think that God is giving us what we deserve. "Maybe God is punishing me?" we think.

I bring Alexander and his horrible day to mind this morning because it gives us a helpful way to understand the story in our Gospel reading. Even Jesus' disciples assume that the man born blind or his parents must have done something wrong for him to be blind. This kind of theological thinking is very common. This kind of theology is what drives the concept of karma in the religion of Hinduism. This kind of thinking is behind a teaching called the prosperity Gospel. If I prosper and am successful in terms of the world's definition of success then it must mean that I am pleasing God with my actions. If I am not successful and prospering then it must be because I am doing something wrong.

These kinds of theological thoughts fail to distinguish between original Sin and actual sin. Original Sin is the reality that we are all born into this world quite seriously as enemies of God. We are not born into a right relationship with God. We are not born trusting our Triune God above all else. This is Original Sin. We need to be born again, born by the water and the Spirit in Holy Baptism in order to have a right relationship with him as his child.

As a result of Original Sin we and the whole creation is at odds with its creator. As St. Paul says, “the creation is growing in the pains of childbirth. Not only the creation but also we ourselves. . .” (Ro 8: 22-3). And in this sinful condition we do not act in a way that pleases him and his Will. This is actual Sin. They are the actions that one does that are against his Will. To put it bluntly, a world in Original Sin is a world that is blind to God’s Will and his ways. It is a world prone to commit all kinds of actual sins.

So to answer the question of the disciples, “Who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind?” (Jn 9:2). He was born into a world, a creation that is not as the Creator intended it. It is a creation that is at odds with its creator. It is a broken creation. Sin brings disease, defects, deformities, blindness, deafness, and the list goes on.

The comfort is that we have a God who sees. Our Creator, God sees the brokenness. He sees the original Sin and its “blinding” effects. He sees the effects that Sin has on your life and mine. He sees a creation in need. And in Jesus he answers with grace and mercy to meet our needs.

In our Gospel reading we hear about our God doing something about the brokenness that he sees. Jesus sees the effects of Sin through one man’s blindness and he takes action to heal and restore. This is simply what Jesus does. Throughout his Ministry he healed and restored those who were sick and ill. He restored sight to the blind. He made the lame to walk. He made the deaf to hear. He made some who were dead to rise again. He sees the broken effects of original Sin and he works to restore and heal. He sees need and he meets the need.

Our seeing God who sees needs and meets it saw our greatest need for a Savior from Sin. And so in Christ he sent one to atone for our Sin to purchase the forgiveness possible to bring us in a right relationship with him once again.

Just as Jesus saw the blind man’s need and used physical, material ways to bring that healing about, so also God comes personally to you in order to meet your greatest need of salvation. He stops short of spit and saliva but he does bring his grace and healing from Sin through water, bread, and wine. Just as the blind man was washed so too you and I are washed clean and baptized into the Christ who came to meet the world’s greatest need of a Savior from Sin. He leads you and me out of blindness to Sin into the light of salvation. And he still works mightily to meet all your physical and spiritual needs as your Father in Heaven.

Forgiven, washed, cleansed, and healed in Christ you and I are free! We are free to see needs and meet them. What needs do you see that others have? What needs does your husband have? What need does your wife have? What needs does your mother have? What needs does your father have? What needs do your children have? What needs do your friends have? What needs do your coworkers have? What needs do your fellow congregation members have? What needs does the community around our Church have? How can God use you right where you are to meet them as his forgiven, healed, washed, and cleansed child? How can he use us as a congregation? As we as a congregation prepare to consider a strategic plan for our future Ministry here and in this community, these are important questions to consider.

As we ask these questions and consider these things let us take comfort in our God who sees our greatest needs and orders all our days—even the terrible, horrible, no good ones—in his peace. Amen.