

**SESSION 9** – Who Sinned? Blaming the Victim - John 9:1-41 (A man born blind receives sight – The Pharisees investigate the healing – Spiritual Blindness

*“Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating. By judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are.”*  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship

Someone is always to blame isn't that right and the disciples are no different than we are in this regard

We reap what we sow and get what we deserve – is the how the thinking goes – It is a natural response to life events – There is always a CAUSE & EFFECT right?

Jesus refutes this thinking here by saying neither this man nor his parents sinned

This is where I wish Jesus had STOPPED – It would have been much easier and clearer for all of us if that was the case!

BUT Jesus goes on to say that this man was born blind so that God's works might be revealed – Darn it all - now the waters are muddied!

Remember our “cause and effect” thinking default mode and here we have Jesus using it of God – God caused this so God can get glory for healing him – IS GOD REALLY THAT SELF SERVING? We will get to this question in a bit!

The main point is this – When we assume that people or their parents or grandparents or great grandparents are completely responsible for their own difficulties it takes the onus off of us to respond with care and compassion

It is much easier to bring out our inner Cain and say we are not our brother's keeper

You made your bed – Now sleep in it!

BUT (again with the But ☺) – Jesus turns table and violates all sorts of laws – SPITTING on ground and TOUCHING this unclean man to bring him physical, social, and spiritual healing BUT – He did it on the Sabbath and in so doing this healing reveals who is truly blind!!

The Disciples/Pharisees/Religious Customs of the day – would have used all this to justify this man's place/position as sinner and outcast!

Jesus exposes us and our ways of labeling folks as insider/outsider clean/unclean righteous/sinner

How is sin defined then? (remember the suppositions) Sin is not having relationship with Jesus

Gail O'Day in the New Interpreter's Bible states, "Sin is fundamentally about one's relationship with God... This flies in the face of views that want to define sin in relation to right actions and thereby establish norms for judgment" (p664)

The healed man clearly recognizes the power of Jesus and tries to get the "ESTABLISHMENT" to see – Ahh - But to no avail – of course

We are so blinded by our investment in the system that promotes judgment that we cannot see it

In verse 34 they drive him out of the synagogue and he confesses Jesus as Lord OUTSIDE the synagogue by the time we get to verse 38 – Remember suppositions once again (We are getting a clear example of the community confessing Jesus outside the synagogue/religious establishment – Insider/Outsider - Sinner/Righteous – Clean/Unclean

Who has the real power those in the system or those on the outside who get it!

Now back to our theological conundrum in vs. 3. Gregg Knepp makes the statement that Jesus is implying here that through the man born blind, God's love and grace is shown or demonstrated as the boundary-crossing gift that it is. And those that continue to live and organize their life around strict categories of unclean/clean etc. etc. will miss the revealing of God's work!

Because the young man's original blindness was also spiritual – He gains spiritual sight also and can confess Jesus

Likewise, to view the man's physical blindness as merely an affliction to be overcome is to fall into the same trap as the Pharisees.

Think about this for a second – the man had blindness but living with this ailment provided him with spiritual insight that the religious professionals caught up in the system did not have because they were looking from the inside out and not the other way around

***Gregg Knepp talks about this phenomenon showing up with folks who have down syndrome, who despite their affliction are often characteristically endowed with a wonderfully playful and joyful spirit. Their ability to enjoy life in the midst of difficulty is a blessing that, in my overly analyzed and anxious life, I often envy!!***

So, the big question for us which is indirect in this text but it is there none-the-less is, "How can God's works be revealed through our supposed short-comings and deficiencies?"

### **Ponderings for Growth from Gregg Knepp and others**

We cannot begin to understand the true nature of Grace until we move beyond the belief that our spiritual life is like an economic transaction

Once we have even an inkling of the Grace of God it allows us to move to a place of compassion for others because we are free from the harsh judgments about ourselves and others that we so easily buy into (notice the use of economic word buy ☺)

No more do we ask then. “Who sinned?” But instead, “How are Gods works being revealed to us?” Some are born into the luck of the draw – accidents of birth – so to speak – and others born into poverty and abuse etc. Who sinned? Is not the question, but the answer is how can God’s works be revealed in this situation for the healing and wholeness of the world we live in – Might mean taking stock of some of our own suppositions about the way we think things are.

We can then be compassionate as Jesus was compassionate – Splanchna is the Greek here in some of these texts Luke 7:13, Mark 1:41, Matthew 14:14 (moved in the guts is the wooden way to say it)

***What volunteer opportunities may serve as venues for us to intentionally grow in our compassion for others and be moved in our guts?***

Too many congregations are unable to shed the view that we (Christians) are better than others. As long as that belief prevails, the congregation can never become a true place of grace.

It’s perhaps the most basic belief of the Christian faith, that none of us are without sin, yet we do our best to separate ourselves from the people that we believe are more sinful than we are. Look at Luke 18:11 (Pharisee praying that he is glad he is not like others...)

A self-righteous church says come on in we are going to give you all the rules and guidelines – But Jesus taught and modeled a different way – That of going out to witness, to share, to inquire, etc. and see the revelations of the Lord!

***How does your congregation view people who are not part of the church? – As objects of evangelism, as sinners who need to be saved – potential members who might help pay the bills...***

***What “image” does your congregation have in the community?***

***How do the leaders of the congregation talk about the congregation and its relationship to the community?***

***What expectations of the Christian life are lifted as examples in the congregation? Do these expectations primarily emphasize compassion towards others and engagement in the world...or do they focus on individual moral guidelines?***