

Text: John 9:1-7

Theme: Why Did This Happen to Me?

Date: February 24, 2008 (Lent 3A)

In the Name of Jesus, who is the Light of the world, Dear Christian Friends,

Doesn't it just bother you when something bad happens to you? It might be over a minor thing, it might be the result of a major thing, but one thing that very often enters our minds, when bad things come into our lives, is the simple question, "Why?" I can't find my keys, and I was supposed to be in my car and out of the house five minutes ago. Why did this happen to me? I left my textbook in my desk or locker at school and I have a test tomorrow. Why did this happen to me? I just can't afford to be off work or out of school with this sickness that doesn't seem to go away or because of this injury that happened in such a freaky way. Why did this happen to me? How can I possibly find the time or develop the patience to help my parents or my grandparents – or myself -- with the loss of their health or their independence. Why did this happen to me? This just was not the right time for my loved one to die. Why did this happen to me?

The "why" question is often the result of another question and that question is, "Do bad things happen to me or to someone else because of something bad that I or someone else have done?" For example, in our sermon text for today, the disciples saw a man who had been born blind. We don't get any impression that they were being mean about it, but they asked a question which many people ask when they see someone who has had something bad happen to him or her. They said to Jesus, "**Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?**" In other words, "Why did this happen to him? He or his parents must have done something wrong."

What Jesus says – and what Jesus does – in answer to this honest, but misguided, question of the disciples can also help us everyday of our lives, whenever we find ourselves, whether over little things or big things, asking the same honest and sometimes tear-filled question, "**WHY DID THIS HAPPEN TO ME?**" Today Jesus teaches us that he uses everything in our life for our spiritual good. Jesus use everything in our life 1) to help us see the Light and he uses everything in our life 2) help us work while there still is light.

1. To help us see the Light

In the words of our text we have Jesus' answer to the question "Why was this man born blind?" Sometimes bad things happen just because we live in a sinful world; just because we live in a world where envy and greed, anger and violence, coveting and jealousy and a whole host of other sins flow out from the sinful natures of people. Sometimes, of course, there is a specific sin that we may have committed that directly led to the problem we are encountering. For example, if we have purposely been unfair or unkind to someone, it's easy to see why they would not want to be our friend. Or, if we have sinned by misusing our money or our time or food or drugs or alcohol, it's easy to see why we may have gotten sick or in trouble or caused harm to someone else. There are times when a specific sin leads to a specific bad result. And for those specific sins, just as for all sins, we need to ask for God's mercy and joyfully receive the reassurance that because of Jesus, our Savior, God continues to have mercy on us, so that with his help we will want to fight against those sins and rejoice in his forgiveness.

But neither Jesus nor the disciples are referring to those kinds of situations with their question and his answer. They are talking about those sad things that happen in life that are not caused by any specific sin, but are caused by sin in the world in general – the sin that's just here and which makes so many things so sad, reminding us that there is simply no way we want to spend any more time than God wants us to on earth before we get to live in the perfect home of heaven, where we'll never again be tempted to ask -- "Why did this happen to me?"

But in the interest of teaching his disciples, Jesus does indeed give an answer to the question of the disciples. The disciples asked: **WHO SINNED**, in other words, "Why was this man born blind?" Jesus' answer was aimed at teaching his disciples that one reason God lets bad things happen to people is to help them see the light. This is what Jesus meant when he said: **NEITHER THIS MAN NOR HIS PARENTS SINNED, BUT THIS HAPPENED SO THAT THE WORK OF GOD MIGHT BE DISPLAYED IN HIS LIFE.**

The expression "might be displayed" has behind it the picture of a light shining on something so you can see it – of something becoming clear that maybe wasn't so clear before. When it comes to seeing the Light, Jesus is talking about spiritual light. He's talking about our faith life. God applies his almighty Word to many different situations in life so that through the Word our faith life might increase and our spiritual life might be blessed. One of the truths of spiritual light that we need to be reminded about is that life in this sinful world is not all that great. In fact, it's not great at all. When bad things happen to us we get a loving reminder from our God in heaven that this earthly, often sad, life is not meant to be the final destination for the child of God. It's not our permanent and everlasting home. (And thank God) We have something to look forward to that goes beyond our present sinful and sad situation. If life in this world was always filled with pleasures and joys, never difficulties or sorrow, we would be more tempted to focus our attention on earthly things – and not on the things of the Spirit and of heaven, or as Jesus says not on the **WORK OF GOD**. God doesn't want us to focus our attention on the temporary things of this world but on the eternal blessings of life in heaven with Jesus. And so that's why Jesus answers the disciples' question with the words **SO THAT THE WORK OF GOD MIGHT BE DISPLAYED IN HIS LIFE.**

And so what is the light of God shining on or we might say, what is the work of God in the life of this blind man that God wants to be brought into the light? It's the same work of God that is in your life and mine. It's the work of God that teaches us that good works do

not remove sin. It's the work of God that teaches that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus. The work of God teaches us that faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit so that no one can boast in their salvation. God alone gets the glory. It's the work of God that teaches us that God does not carry out his vengeful wrath on believers. He took his righteous wrath out on Jesus instead. The work of God teaches us that God doesn't take good people to heaven, only perfect people. It teaches us that we are declared not guilty, declared perfect in God's sight by the blood of Jesus. This is the light of the gospel that God wants to shine on this blind man and on you and me and his disciples.

You know, it's kind of ironic that the disciples say they were in the dark about the reason this man was born blind, but Jesus is telling them that he was born blind so that they might not be in the dark any more. Jesus, the all powerful God, showed his power over this man's physical blindness by healing him so that he could see again with his eyes. Sometimes Jesus just spoke the word and a miracle resulted. Here, for whatever reason, we're told that he spit on the ground, made some mud out of the saliva and put it on the man's eyes. He then told the man to wash it off in what was called the Pool of Siloam, a pool of water outside one of the gates of Jerusalem, from which water flowed into the city as an extra water supply for the people who lived there.

But what was supplied on this day in the Pool of Siloam was a miracle to people like you and me to help us see the light when it comes to the reason why God allows bad things to happen in our lives. It is always meant to help us see Jesus. God sometimes allows bad things to happen so that we more diligently search his Word for comfort, for strength, for the promises of God. These promises assure us of God's forgiveness and the truth that God isn't punishing me for my sin. These promises assure us that in all things God works for the spiritual good of his people. This is God's promise for you, so that you might see the light but it's not just for you alone. There is another reason why God sometimes let bad things happen to us but that answer has very little to do with us and much more to do with others in our life.

So when we're tempted to ask, "*Why did this happen?*" we know that God wants us to see the light, but he also wants others to see the light of Jesus through us.

2. To help us work while there's Light

In the words of our text Jesus said: **AS LONG AS IT IS DAY, WE MUST DO THE WORK OF HIM WHO SENT ME. NIGHT IS COMING, WHEN NO ONE CAN WORK. WHILE I AM IN THE WORLD, I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.** Jesus was making it clear that he only had a set amount of time to do the work he had been sent to do. As we look back, we can see that in God's eternal plan, he worked out a three year period of time in which Jesus would carry out his ministry.

From our study of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we know that he accomplished everything he was sent to do – primarily preaching and teaching about the responsibility we need to take in regard to the sins that we commit and the loving forgiveness of sins which he had come to bring by dying for them. In the Gospels we see Jesus working while there was light by performing miracle after miracle to help people who were possessed by demons or burdened with physical afflictions, like this blind man, or grieving over the loss of loved ones, some of whom he brought back to life -- in all of these ways giving the people of Israel opportunity after opportunity to see that he truly was the long-promised Christ and Savior of the world. In the Gospels we see Jesus working while there was light by experiencing hatred and enduring attacks, even to the point, of course, of his horrid death – all of which leaves us breathless, as we wonder why he didn't say, "*Why is this happening to me?*" and just walk away, which he certainly could have. And in the Gospels we also see Jesus working while there was light by taking time off from his work with the crowds to work with his heavenly Father in devotion and prayer -- in that way reminding us that sometimes the work of God is not doing so much work, but simply letting our dear God do the work of filling us up with his loving corrections and his gentle reminders that he remains in total charge and in complete control of everything that happens to us, so we don't have to worry about any negative answer to our heartfelt question, "Why did this happen to me?" It's meant to help me work while there's light.

Each of us, just like Jesus, have only a certain number of months and years left to do the work of God while there's light. Thankfully, because of the work that Jesus did I don't have to do the work of saving myself from my sins, and, thankfully, because of the work that Jesus did, I know that my years on earth will lead to the work of praising my Lord forever in heaven. But in the meantime, with God's help, you and I can work while we have any light left in our lives to use everything we have and everything we are – even when we are in difficult circumstances -- in the service of the Lord Jesus who paid for us with his blood, and who watches over us with his love.

Why did this happen to me? Many times there really is not a specific reason. But all of the time there is a specific purpose. Whenever you go through something bad, or if you are now going through something bad, whether a big thing or a small thing, remember that through it, as you listen to God speak in his Word, your Lord will help you see the light as to what's the key to happiness in life. He will help you see Jesus. And he will also help you to work while there's light, so that you can live in that happiness of Jesus and share that happiness with people, whom God may very well have put into your life to have you help them answer the very same question you may be asking, whether you know it or not, "Why did this happen to me?" When you keep your eyes on the one who could heal a man born blind, you never know the light you will be able to enjoy for yourself and to bring into the life of someone else. And that's why whatever has happened to you has happened to you. Amen.