

Oregon City United Methodist Church
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Series: The Body of Christ
Sermon: The Feet of Christ

John 9:1-2

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?”

I John 1:5-7, 2:3-6, 9-11

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

Sermon

There are places that I don’t want to go. When I was a kid, my mom would drag me to stores that didn’t have any interest for someone my age. Several hours in a fabric store. Sitting in a mechanic’s shop. Waiting for others to get their haircuts. Anytime mom said, “lets hop in the car”, we knew it wasn’t going to be fun. I couldn’t wait to be old enough to stay home, or until I could get my license and go anywhere I want. But even as you get older, you still have to go to places where you don’t want to go. It might be to the doc. It might be to your crazy cousin Steve’s house. It might be to work. I had three jobs in college. One of them was at a gas station. Being 18, I got the bad shifts. Late at night, early in the morning. I had the 6 a.m. shift on Sunday mornings all by myself - this is before my going to church days. I would get up at 5 a.m. to open up the gas station, driving on the gravel roads in the dark on my way to work. All my friends are sleeping in. I promised myself right then and there, once I’m done with this job, I will **never** work on Sunday mornings again. I still don’t work on Sundays. It’s worship. But there are times even today, when I go to places I’d rather not be. I have a hard time visiting the slums of America. I have a hard time visiting the shelters in our area. I have a hard time helping someone out, when I think that they should help themselves. I know you never have those thoughts, but they run through my head every now and then.

It is one of those less than endearing facts of life that those who get the worst deal in life tend to also have to put up with the sneers of those who are more fortunate suggesting that in some way they are to blame for the kicks in the teeth that they endure. Or our Gospel reading this morning tells us of man who was down on his luck and who suffered the same sort of pious sneers as to whether his sufferings were his own fault. He was a blind man who had to beg in order to exist. I don’t know about you but I shudder when I hear the question put to Jesus by his closest followers;

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

The theology behind the question is surely vile to us. It represents a theology that provides us with a repugnant view of God, a view of God that were it to be true would in all honesty make it impossible for me to worship God. And yet it was not seen as the view of crackpots. Far from it. This question came out of the orthodoxy of the time of Jesus. After all, a theology had come to prevail from the time of the exile which suggested that if a person or nation was faithful to God, then rewards and blessings would follow. As for a person or nation that was unfaithful, the opposite outcome would occur. And to be fair it was a theology that enabled people to make sense of the horrors of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the elite. More than that it was a theology that enabled those who returned to create a nation that took faithfulness to God seriously.

But the problem was that it created an image of a thoroughly capricious and petty God. So it becomes a theology that is an abomination. And yet it had deep roots. We see it in the friends of Job who rebuke him amidst his sufferings - in love of course! In that regard Jesus rejects this wretched perspective. And so he does in this case.

So let us be clear that a theology that suggests God is pleased with the rich or the healthy but displeased with the poor or the sick is a total abomination. And so it needs to be rejected and exposed wherever it rears its ugly head. Indeed, let any theology that denies the absolute love of God be confronted. Instead may we seek to always represent God as all loving as is seen in Jesus. For the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ cannot be in conflict with the loving, inclusive Jesus. Theology matters because it is important that we do not misrepresent the God to whom we point people towards. Be gone indeed, every life denying image of God! It was a few years ago, that an earthquake hit the people of Haiti. We have all seen the images. We have all felt the sorrow in our hearts. But maybe you have heard someone ask that same old question. Rabbi, who sinned to have caused such destruction? I remember Godly church people ask that. And maybe you have heard some of the same old answers. The People of Haiti signed a pact with the devil and this is their just reward. They are a godless nation and this is what happens to godless nations. And if you go to the web you will find countless arguments as to why this happened - up and down the bloggosphere you can read how Obama caused the earthquake. Then someone else retorts that it was Bush's policies that put Obama where he is - so by extension, Bush caused the earthquake. And I have to think to myself, and to use theological terms, are we really this nuts? God pronounced his judgement on Haiti and leveled it to the ground. In all honesty, if God wanted Haiti gone, it would be gone. The people of the Dominican Republic would look over and say, "Wasn't there a country here? Where did it go?" But the theology still comes up. God pronounced his judgment on New Orleans and whammo, we get Katrina. You remember hearing those arguments, don't you? God hates Indoneasia and splash, Tsunami. The U.S. tolerates gays and lesbians, and we tolerate abortions and the death penalty and gambling and you name it, and we get 9-11, God's judgement at the hands of crazies. I can see where the idea comes from, because we believe in the idea of cause and effect. Action and consequence. A leads to B. If I drive drunk, and smack into another car and kill somebody. Yeah, that's on my head. I caused that. Cause and effect. I embezzle money from my place of work, get fired and thrown into jail, that's on my head. I caused that. Action and consequence. I go into a payday loan place and wind up in a cycle of debt and pain and foreclosure and bankruptcy, then complain that they were ripping me off, they were ripping me off, but I'm the idiot that signed up for that trip. Cause and effect. I go to Vegas and put money down on the Cubs 2015 season. How stupid can I get? Goodbye money. My fault. Action and consequence. And so I can see how you can take that kind of thinking and apply it to any horrible disaster out there. And so, Rabbi, who sinned that caused this earthquake? Who sinned that caused Katrina? Who sinned that caused 9-11? That one, I got the answer. 19 crazy people. It was about seven years ago, and I was doing a funeral service for a 96 year old man. After the service, the granddaughter of the man, about my age, maybe a little older came up to me and asked, "Pastor Mike, why did Grandpa have to die?" And I understand that the question was born out of grief and loss, but the more we talked, the more it became evident that it was a serious question, "Why did God take grandpa home, we had a lot of other things we wanted to do in life." And I wanted to say, but my pastoral sensibilities wouldn't allow me to, "The guy was 96 years old. What more do you want? He got 25 more years than the average joe!" Who sinned and caused this earthquake? It was a earthquake. Plate Techtonics, to be precise! We live in a dangerous world! And if you haven't figured it out yet, there are a lot of disasters that can get you!

Tsuamies, floods, landslides, lighting, hurricanes, tornadoes, pestilence, disease, drought, radiation, just ask Pompeii about volcanoes, wild animals, west nile, Aids, Malaria, polio, small pox, chicken flu, swine flue, killer bees, cancer, heart attacks, strokes, disgruntled spouses, choking hazzards, gangrene, rattlesnakes, stampedes, shopping at Walmart, street crime, accidents, electrocution, drowning, and for the love of God, do not go outside without sunblock SPF 3000 or you will burst into flames and die. Maybe I threw a couple that shouldn't be in there, but I left out thousands of ways to check out of this life as well. We live in a world where stuff beyond our control happens. Earthquakes happen.

And so, for the question of "Where was God in this earthquake" let's take a look at our scripture reference this morning. We have a blind man. So what does Jesus do? He sees an opportunity to work for good in a bad situation. And Jesus engages with this man. In John's account he doesn't even wait to be asked to help. He just gets on and helps a man in need. Making mud with his saliva, Jesus spreads it on the man's eyes - there are echoes here of the creation story in Genesis, how God brought man to life from the dust of the earth. He tells the man to wash in the pool of Siloam on the south side of the Temple. And the result is that the man is enabled to see. Now hold on to this. Jesus responds to suffering by opening up the possibilities of God working loving purposes in the situation. And that is surely a good model for us. Where is God in the earthquake? He is in the helping hands of removing rubble. In the bandaging of wounds. He is in the tears of those who mourn. He is in the response of the world who is descending the best they can into the one-runway capital. He is in the rebuilding of lives, of giving hope to those who only see destruction, God is in the business of changing hearts and giving light when all we can see is despair and darkness. God didn't cause the earthquake, but God, through his people will rebuild a nation. God didn't cause the hurricane, but people of faith have responded in amazing ways. God didn't cause homelessness, or poverty, or loneliness, or slums. Jesus didn't come down to shake his finger at folk. He just helped where he could. Maybe I need to check my pride at the door. Not ask, "who sinned, that caused you to be a drug addict?", but to try and walk a mile in their shoes, and open my heart to compassion, rather than judgement. There are places that I still don't want to go. But Christ went to places he didn't want to go either - his journey led him to the cross. To have the feet of Christ means to walk in love and light - wherever the Spirit leads - helping each other out. And the people of God said, Amen.