

John 9:1-41

02 March 14 Lent 4 A - "True Sight"

"God Is More Than We Think" (theodicy)

God is more than we think. That's mainly what I hear John chapter 9 almost screaming at us this morning. God is more than we think. In Jesus' time there was a real back to the Bible movement. The leaders of that movement were serious about their relationship with God. They searched the Scriptures for rules to live by, and they did a pretty good job of living by those rules. Jesus himself said so. We know those good leaders by the name Pharisees. And while Jesus had some good things to say about them and in fact hung out with them and went to dinner parties with them, he had two huge criticisms of them. The first is that they were self-righteous. And the second—and this is the really big one—was that while they found the rules, they completely missed God. God is way more than what they thought.

For the Pharisees, religion had to be practical, concrete, and logical: the kind of thing you could put down in a power point presentation so that people could understand it. Keep it simple; black and white. So, Jesus heals on the Sabbath. But the rules say "do no work on the Sabbath." Logically, then, what Jesus did must be wrong. Therefore, the pharisees say to themselves, Jesus cannot be from God, and there must be some other explanation for what happened. Which is why they keep quizzing both the blind man and his parents. What happened doesn't fit into their neat system. They got the rules; they got the law. But they didn't get God. With God, mercy always trumps law.

This kind of thing, this kind of overturning of our neat logical systems, happens time after time after time in the Gospels. It's pretty sad the pharisees don't get it. It's even more sad that the *disciples* mostly didn't seem to get it. In their system, God was just and had to punish sin. And if a man was born blind, then it had to be God's punishment for some sin. They see a blind man, and their reaction is to try to assign blame, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" But God is more than they thought. For when Jesus sees the blind man, *his* reaction is to show mercy and thus reveal the glory of God.

It's sad the Pharisees didn't get it. It's even more sad the disciples didn't get it. But you know what's really sad? What's really said is that we so often don't get it. I mean how do we deal with the great sufferings and evils of this world?

Sometime we blame the victims. If they're poor, it's their own fault. Either they or their parents sinned.

Or we treat the great sufferings of this world as intellectual problems with which to wrestle. We say either that God is in complete control, at the wheel. God has got a plan for the world, and it's good. You just have to believe. Or we say that God is a mystery and we don't have any answers for why there is so much suffering in this world.

Frankly, I find both responses to be troubling. Those who claim to know some reason, some

rationale for tragedies and suffering make God out to look mean. When they say God has a plan, they seem to dismiss the suffering of other human beings. The others who refuse to say anything make God out to look rather detached and aloof and uncaring but God is more than what we think.

In today's story, Jesus does not blame the victim. Neither does he treat this man's suffering as an intellectual problem. He spits on the ground, makes a paste of the dust and saliva, and heals the man. Jesus does not engage in theological speculation. He is there with the man, touches the man, heals him, and thus reveals the glory of God.

I don't think we are called to answer questions we cannot answer. When we try, we just get it wrong. God is more than we think. Rather, we are called to do God's work of healing and of building up the Kingdom. That means ministering to those who are suffering. It means proclaiming the victory of Christ's cross. And it means celebrating God's presence among us. Maybe the saddest part of today's Gospel story is that when the blind man was healed, nobody said, "Hey, he can see! Let's celebrate!" The party didn't happen then. So we set the table today, we celebrate today, celebrating Christ's healing presence among us and being strengthened for Christ's work in the world. That we can do.