

## **"Everything (and Nothing) to Lose; Nothing (and Everything) to Gain"**

Text: John 9:1-7, 13-16, 39-41

Grace, mercy and peace be yours from our Savior-God – the only entity that truly comprehends the incalculable value of such gifts. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

It seems that when extraordinary tragedy strikes, more than anything else our society looks for a way to convince themselves that something like that could never (or at least *will* never) happen to them. At times like that the world grasps for any sort of comfort they can find, real or imagined. Without God in their lives, this can be a difficult proposition. When the planes hit the towers, for example, the comfort for many came in reasoning that such things only happen in big cities like New York. When there is a break-in: *"Well we always lock our doors"* and *"That's a high-crime neighborhood."* When someone falls ill, the balm is that *"they smoked,"* or *"they never took care of themselves."* The implication, of course, is that if I can find some circumstance that doesn't apply to me, then I can thereby manufacture some assurance that that sort of thing won't happen to me. You can even something of a superstition at work here, as in *"If I show obvious compassion for the one suffering, perhaps that will ward off anything like that from happening to me."*

This is nothing new, of course. In Jesus' day they had a simple tonic for such occasions that virtually everyone carried around in their back pocket (or wherever they carried such things if they didn't have pockets): *"If something bad happens to someone, that means they are being punished for something they did wrong. If I don't do what they did, all will be well."* And this wasn't just some of society back then; everyone seemed to have bought into it – even Jesus' own disciples.

That's where our text for this morning begins. The text that will teach us more about this particular topic, as well as a variety of other valuable truths, is found in John's Gospel, the Ninth Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 9:1-7,13-16,39-41** *As he passed by, he (Jesus) saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup> We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." <sup>6</sup> Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with*

*the mud <sup>7</sup> and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. <sup>13</sup> ¶ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup> Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup> So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." <sup>16</sup> Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them... <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." <sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" <sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.*

So far the very words of God. These are not only the words of God; here is where that same God has promised to meet with us, to calm us, to comfort and assure us. To prepare our hearts to meet here with our God, and to learn from him, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

You undoubtedly caught the false inference that plagued even Jesus' own men in our text. Since the man they encountered was *born* blind, they reasoned that his handicap had to be a result of God's punishment. The only thing they wondered was whether the parents or the man himself was being punished. Jesus here teaches us to look for no such correlation. Tragedy strikes the good and the bad, and only God knows why. Only God possesses the wisdom and insight to understand the whole, big, complicated picture. In the case of the man in our text, only Jesus could ascertain that this man was born blind for a particular reason: ***"that the works of God might be displayed in him."***

Think about that for a bit. Does it seem overly cruel to you that God would allow this man and his parents to suffer for so many years *just for that moment in time recorded in our text?* Sometimes the question itself is the problem. Ask it a bit differently: *"If even one soul was brought to saving faith and thereby rescued from eternal torment by the healing of this man born blind, would anyone here consider a lifetime of blindness too steep a price to pay for something like that?"* Or ask the question from yet another angle: Would you be willing to have someone else suffer in that way if that is what it took to open *your* eyes? Obviously it is only the Word that converts and saves, but what an interesting window into our own hearts, isn't it? Disturbing measure, among other things, as to how well we are doing with the Second Table of the Law: ***"And thou shalt love thy***

**neighbor as thyself.**" Most of us would consider it reasonable and well worth it for someone else to be afflicted so that we could come to know our Savior. We tend to pause when the suffering is ours and our neighbor is the beneficiary.

Jesus saw the big picture. Always. He disabused his disciples of the notion that either this man or his parents were being punished, and then revealed to us a truth far too valuable to miss: **Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."** These words from our Savior will prove most helpful to us if we take them in and make them our own. Things happen to us in this sin-broken world that we will never be able to fully understand, but these words from our Savior will help. How fortunate the man in our text truly was to be able to serve as that which displayed **"the works of God."** You and I will most likely never know if or when God is giving us that privilege, but we certainly have the terrible power to abdicate that role. We do that whenever we fail to accept what God allows into our lives with grace and humility. I've seen many Christians display extraordinary humility and perseverance in the midst of terrible suffering – and then reflect any praise or glory back to their Savior-God. What a rare and priceless gift and example.

So also I hope I get to meet the man in our text in heaven some day. You have to love how he handled the Jewish rulers that called him in for questioning after he was healed. This exchange is particularly telling (verses from this section but not included in our text for this morning): **So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner."** <sup>25</sup> **He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."** <sup>26</sup> **They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"** <sup>27</sup> **He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"** <sup>28</sup> **And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses."** <sup>29</sup> **We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."** <sup>30</sup> **The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes."** <sup>31</sup> **We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.** <sup>32</sup> **Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.** <sup>33</sup> **If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."** <sup>34</sup> **They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.** (John 9:24-34)

The "rest of the story" is that after being "cast out" (excommunicated) by the Jews, Jesus found the man and revealed himself to him as the Savior, after which we hear those best of all possible words: **Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"** <sup>36</sup> **He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"** <sup>37</sup> **Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you."** <sup>38</sup> **He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.** (John 9:35-38)

Sometimes knock-offs (fakes or forgeries) don't matter. Sometimes they do. One famous forger, Dutch artist Han van Meegeren, made an astonishing \$60 million by replicating Johannes Vermeer's style and then allowing his paintings to be sold to unknowing buyers who thought them to be genuine. He got away with it until one of his paintings was sold to Hermann Göring, the Nazi who founded the Gestapo and later commanded the Luftwaffe. Van Meegeren was arrested for treason for refusing to name the original owner of the masterpiece – which, of course, he couldn't do – for a number of reasons. Another forger, Elmyr de Hory, was so good and became so famous that forgeries of his forgeries began to show up around the world.

History is full of stories where counterfeit works of art hung in the most prestigious museums for decades before they were discovered to be forgeries. The question that then begs to be asked: *"Did it really matter? If the painting were that good that they fooled experts for years, who really cares?"* We see the same sort of thing today. Could anyone here tell the difference between a genuine Rolex and a good imitation? A \$35,000 Louis Vuitton handbag and a \$25 knock-off? Who, with the naked eye, could tell a cubic zirconium from a diamond? The real problem only comes if/when the fake is discovered. A word of caution is in order to you young men not to try to present your fiancé with a fake diamond. I feel certain you would rather face Göring's wrath if discovered.

Our Savior was wise enough not to take any risks by choosing a man for this miraculous demonstration that no one could ever doubt. This was not only a man *born* blind, he was a man known to all in the community. By choosing this man, Jesus performed a miracle whose authenticity no one could ever question. Some of you may remember a purported faith healer named V. W. Grant. The investigative show *Prime Time* investigated the man and caught him receiving information on a wireless earpiece from his wife, who was backstage. He pretended to be gaining the information via divine revelation, instead of from his wife, who had previously interviewed

members of the audience. Whether God ever works through men like that is up to God, but the revelation did irreparable harm to his ministry and, more importantly, to the faith he represented to the world.

Jesus, again, was anything but a fraud – and his mission was to demonstrate to the world that he was very different from those who had come before and from all who would come after. He therefore found a man who, in the eyes of the world, had nothing to lose, but who in the eyes of God had both everything to lose and everything to gain.

We know that this man was born blind, and as such he was something of a parasite on society. The people recognized him as a beggar they had regularly seen around town. To society then, he was worthless – producing nothing and only taking. Since life to the godless is all about getting the most out of this life, they regarded the man as more or less worthless unless and until he could regain his sight. Jesus saw him differently. He saw a human soul in need of rescue. He saw a man who believed he had nothing to lose by going to Jesus, but who in fact had everything to gain.

The man more than likely believed that if only he could receive his sight, all would be well. Jesus knew he needed a much different kind of "sight" – the very *sight* that Jesus came to give: ***Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."*** This was a paradox or riddle that the Jews couldn't solve. They were just perceptive enough to know that Jesus was referring to them as among those who were "blind": ***Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?"*** Again Jesus answered them with a paradox they could not grasp: ***Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."***

Jesus was, of course, condemning them for placing their confidence in their own owner-provided righteousness. The blindness he was referring to was the spiritual blindness that every human being shares apart from Jesus Christ. It is an inability or refusal to recognize themselves as sinners in desperate need of a Savior. The blind are those who believe that they themselves can (and in most cases are) doing what needs to be done to earn heaven.

Christians have been given "sight" that the world will always regard as blindness. Yet we still miss much. We still lose sight of much that we once knew. We still drift, and we therefore – until we are called home – have *everything* to lose. On the other hand, when it comes to the things of this world, we truly have *nothing* to lose. Nothing material in this life

lasts, which means that failure to accumulate what this world has to offer should never concern us. In that sense we have nothing to lose because nothing here will survive Judgment Day. This life is all about the life that is to follow. When we know Jesus as Lord and Savior, we have that life – and therefore we lack nothing of any lasting, eternal value.

What then is left in this world to gain? Possessing faith in Jesus Christ, what else is there that has any lasting, eternal value? Souls, and they are all around us. The Holy Spirit has removed our spiritual blindness, but part of what that now enables us to see is the countless throng of wandering souls that don't yet know their Savior. We therefore, who now lack nothing, still have much to gain, for our God has indentified ***"making disciples of all nations"*** as our life's work. Therefore take these words of our Savior home with you this morning: ***"We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work."*** While you and I now *lack* nothing, we are surrounded by those who *have* nothing. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 42:14-21** For a long time I have held my peace; I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant. <sup>15</sup> I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. <sup>16</sup> And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them. <sup>17</sup> They are turned back and utterly put to shame, who trust in carved idols, who say to metal images, "You are our gods." <sup>18</sup> Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! <sup>19</sup> Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD? <sup>20</sup> He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. <sup>21</sup> The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 5:8-14** For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, <sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: [www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)

Mark Johnson, President Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

The Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 26, 2017

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 158 (Red Hymnal)

"Glory Be to Jesus"

## The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Isaiah 42:14-21) This reading is a lament for the fallen people of Israel. We are here taught that although the message and the promises that were given to the Jews were good and right, they themselves rejected that message, and the result is described as an abject tragedy. We too have been showered with our God's grace, therefore we too need to recognize the danger we face while in this world, since every Christian has the terrible power to throw away eternal life.

**The Epistle Lesson:** (Ephesians 5:8-14) We are here once again reminded of just what it was from which we were rescued by our God, which was slavery to sin and Satan. By God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ we have now been freed from that tyranny, washed clean, and declared to be heirs of eternal life. We must still, for a time, remain in the world, but now we are to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Hymnal page 22)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 151 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Christ, the Life of All the Living"

## The Sermon – Text: John 9:1-7, 13-16, 39-41 (Printed on the back page)

**"Everything (and Nothing) to Lose"**

## The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

## The Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 159 (Red Hymnal)

"Go to Dark Gethsemane"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

## The Distribution

## The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 47 (Red Hymnal)

"Savior Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

## Attendance - Sunday (53) Ave (45) (Wednesday (25)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/coffee time
<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Lenten Service
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/coffee time
	<b>-11:30 a.m.</b>	– Choir practice

**CLC News** – Pastor David Schaller is considering the call to be interim pastor at Rock of Ages Lutheran, Grand Rapids MI. Immanuel of Winter Haven FL has called Pastor David Schaller. Sherman Carstensen has accepted the call to teach and help with the administration of the school at Immanuel of Mankato. Immanuel has also called Pastor Neal Radichel. Redeemer of Cheyenne has called Ann Sprengeler to teach K-8 at its school. Teacher Joshua Ohlmann has returned the call to Grace of Sleepy Eye MN.

**Lenten Schedule** – Please make plans to attend our midweek Lenten services during this sacred season.

**Church Choir Offering** – Anyone who would like to contribute to the ILC Tour Choir Fund (which enables their annual spring tour) please mark your offerings "ILC Tour Choir" and drop them in the offering plate.

**Women's Fellowship** – Representatives of the St Paul Women's Fellowship are asked to meet with the Pastor and Trustee Coordinator Fettig this morning to discuss the proposed kitchen remodeling project.