

**EPHESIANS 5:1-14 (p. 949)**

**MARCH 26, 2017**

**JOHN 9:1-41 (p. 869)**

**BLAINE**

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Move us Lord, from darkness to light, for as Paul says, we are called to be “Children of the Light”. Illuminate our paths with your Word. Make each and every step that we take reflect your Truth. And remove our blindness Lord, so that we don’t stumble as we walk, especially of our own accord. We ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.

**“SIMPLE FAITH”**

This passage from John challenges me. And it should! In fact, it should challenge all of us, because if we are honest, we can all relate to someone in the text! “Who sinned?” It’s the sixty-four thousand dollar question, isn’t it! And boy, are we ever quick to ask and answer it! “Who sinned? Who’s to blame? Who’s wrong in this particular situation?” It’s almost as if we are hard-wired to find fault, isn’t it, or at least deflect it! Because that, somehow, alleviates our responsibility!

It started in the Garden with Adam and Eve. Adam said, “She gave me the fruit!” Eve immediately pointed at the Serpent. “He told me too.” And the Serpent even joins in the blame game. He tries to pin it on God. “Did God really say you shouldn’t eat from that particular tree? Was He clear when He gave you those instructions, cause it seems a little of vague!” ...Who sinned?

Who sinned, Rabbi that this man was born blind? Was it him, or his parents? Who's the guilty party? Who's at fault here? It had to be somebody otherwise God would not have unleashed His wrath like this. So who crossed the theological line? Things like this don't just happen, you know. There has to be a culprit. So who's at fault Teacher—this guy, who has had to deal with his affliction his entire life—or his parents, who have been forced to take care of him all this time? ...Who sinned?

Maybe you can see yourself in the Disciple's shoes? Or maybe you are a bit more pious than they are? But before you answer, consider when you might have stood right where they are standing. "Who's to blame, that unruly child throwing a fit in the check-out lane, or his obviously over-tolerant parents, or the store for placing the candy at eye-level in the first place?" "Who's at fault, the belligerent teenager who is constantly getting reprimanded for his behavior—or his parents, who got divorced—or his school counselor who apparently doesn't care—or the bully who terrorizes him daily at school?" "Who is the guilty party, the woman with five kids from five fathers, who lives off the system—or the dads, or the system, or society as a whole?" I mean these people are coloring outside of the lines, right? They are ignoring the agreed-upon social norms and standards! So someone, therefore, is obviously to blame! ...So who sinned?

Now if you don't see yourself, yet, look again at the story. I mean there are other places where we might relate. What about the blind man's neighbors who are trying to back away from Jesus' miracle, back away from a "healed sinner", or back away from a "sinner who heals"? What's wrong with them? They were eye-witnesses, weren't they?

Or what about the Pharisees who are trying so hard to theologically explain-away the healing, to blame Jesus for interfering with “the Hand of God”? What’s their problem anyway? Why are they so closed minded? ...But doesn’t even asking these questions—looking down on the neighbors, or the Pharisees for that matter, actually make us just like the Disciples? “Who sinned?”

We are pretty good at asking and answering the question, aren’t we! We do easily jump to conclusions! We are experts really, almost Pharisaical, when it comes to overlaying our ethical or religious interpretations on all kinds of events and situations! We use our beliefs, our values, our understanding of how things are “supposed to work” to measure the lives of others! It’s all in an effort to maintain the Faith of course! “Do you see that person over there, the one swamped in tragedy, the one whose life is so bleak? Well, they obviously brought it on themselves! They either did something bad, or refrained from doing something good. That has to be the case otherwise God wouldn’t have let that happen!

Remember Hurricane Katrina back in 2005? There was a news article detailing how many Casinos were destroyed on the Gulf Coast. The author was suggesting that the storm hit where it hit, because of sin. God sent a hurricane to Mississippi and Louisiana because they had legalized gambling! There was a follow-up article the next day, from a Methodist Pastor in Alabama. He said, “If the Lord was targeting Casinos, then He sure needs to improve His aim! That storm took out eight casinos, but almost a hundred Methodist churches!” ...Who sinned?

Trust me, when I read this passage I really want to start throwing “blame stones” at the Disciples myself. But in truth, they are no different than we are, are they? Nor are the townspeople for that matter! They simply don’t get it. This is so strange to them! Something must be wrong! “No way is this the same blind man we’ve know all these years! This isn’t how God works!”

The Pharisees aren’t really the bad guys either. In fact, they are a group of deeply religious folk who are simply very passionate about their faith! It matters to them how it is expressed! It matters to them how it is maintained! They just have a strong sense of right and wrong! And they have the Law too, a guide given to them by Almighty God Himself! They just want to do what’s right! They truly want to be faithful people! Their motives are pure, aren’t they, like many religious people today! ...So I wonder if we can see ourselves in the story!

A sinner, or the son of a sinner, depending on your theological perspective, is suddenly healed, which sets off an ecclesiastical firestorm! That’s just not right! And the healing took place on a Sabbath too, so the sparks really start to fly! Jesus, an out-of-town Rabbi, an outsider, has done something controversial, broken with tradition, disobeyed the Law! And everyone seems to think they have a handle on what’s going on! Everyone feels as if they clearly understand God!

And yet, ironically, it’s only a blind man who actually has vision here! “I don’t know if this Jesus is a sinner or not,” he says. “What I do know is, I was blind and now I see.”

“I’m not an expert in Systematic Theology. I haven’t memorized the Prophets and the Writings. But that’s not my fault, you see, I used to be blind. I don’t have all the answers here guys. I can’t tell you what Tradition teaches in this regard, or what Messiah breaking into our world might mean. One thing I do know, though, I was blind and now I see! And now that I can see, I think I’ll keep my eyes on Him!”

I love that, don’t you! What a beautiful, straightforward, simple statement of faith! “All I know is, I was blind and now I see!” Imagine, if in the midst of all the religious controversies and debates in our world today—all the accusations and questions—during each and every heated theological discussion—we kept this simple, profound premise ever before us! “I was blind and now I see.” How would that change things? How would our life together unfold? Would religious arguments or disagreements even be possible?

“As he went along, Jesus saw a man blind from birth.” Notice that Jesus sees the blind man. The Disciples, however, only notice the sin! Rabbi, who sinned—this man or his parents? We need to figure it out, affix the blame! And implicitly, “We need to figure it out so that we can shun the responsible party! You know, treat them differently, ignore them, and therein feel better about ourselves! Or better yet, get them to repent and be like us!”

No one sinned, said Jesus! (And I want to add, except maybe you for being hypocritical!) This happened so that God would be displayed in their life! This tragedy, along with the accompanying miracle, is intended to Glorify God!

And that, I am convinced, is the purpose for everything! Look around! See how creation points to God! Remember why Abraham was called, and why Moses was given the burning bush! God's self-revelation was the purpose of the plagues in Egypt, and the rescue from captivity, and the pillars of fire and cloud! It's why God provided the manna in the desert, and the Promised Land, and the Nation of Israel itself! It's the purpose of the Prophets, and Scripture, and Jesus—the Word made flesh! It's why God created the Apostles and the church, why we are here, and why all those judgments at the end of time are mentioned in Revelation! All of this, everything, is designed to make God known!

Jesus, in His farewell address even tells us to “Go and make disciples of all nations!” Notice that He doesn't say, “Go and pick out sinners! Ostracize all those who you think are wrong! Marginalize anyone you see as different!” NO! The point, the purpose, the very reason that we are here, is to witness to God! Not decide who is worthy and who is not! Let God do that! Let the Holy Spirit do the convicting! And let God do the judging!

A man, blind from birth—a man, who, because of his blindness, would have never been educated—a man who could not have possibly been able to make a living working at a trade—a man who would have sat by the gates of the city, or outside the Great Temple, begging for money and food as the faithful walked by—was touched by the Lord! This was not a great man! This was not a proud man! And this was certainly not a man who had won deep respect from the community! But Jesus comes to him, and blesses him, and heals him. And now his life will glorify God. “I was blind and now I see!” ...Do you see yourself in the story now?

Immediately everyone in the wider community joins the debate. Some of them are “wowed”, but others are quite skeptical. This guy’s neighbors even start arguing over whether he’s the same man or not! Jerusalem was big, but not that big. These people would have grown up alongside this man. They couldn’t help but see him sitting in the streets every single day of their lives, unless, of course, they intentionally shielded their eyes. All that pain and suffering! Maybe some of them really didn’t recognize the man, because they had spent all those years in some kind of self-inflicted blindness of their own! ...Once again, do we see ourselves?

The Pharisees, the religious movers and shakers, in a courtroom drama, in a theological and ecclesiastical council, are sitting as both judge and jury in order to decide what is right, and what is wrong! If the man before them cannot justify the theological significance of what has just taken place—if he cannot give a dissertation on the existential meaning of this miracle—if he cannot explain the ontological significance of this healer named Jesus—then things are really going to hit the fan! This is heady stuff! And these are all heady people! Or so they believe. These are the Gatekeepers of the Faith, and they have a job to do! ...So which side of the bench are you on? What’s your role in the story?

I can’t help but notice how the blind man’s parents respond. Here they have a grown son, who has been blind since birth, who has now experienced a miracle, and can see! But instead of rejoicing—instead of being thrilled—instead of praising God with exuberance, they back away!

And when they are asked to testify, they panic! They say, “Well, he’s our son all right, and he was born blind. But if you want to know anything else, like about this miracle stuff, then you are going to have to ask him. He is of age you know, he’ll tell you. Don’t ask us.” They are scared! They don’t want to get involved! They’re worried about their own skin, or reputation, even though they know a miracle has taken place! So they deny the truth, and back away. ...How about now? Any recognition at all!

Who sinned, the would-be faithful ask. And Jesus says, that’s not the point! ... You know, that might be the entire key to sharing our faith with a world that cannot see! ... This situation, says Jesus, like every other situation, is so that God’s Presence will be made known! I’m the healer! That’s all you need to worry about! Remember, you too were once blind, but now can see!

This faith thing isn’t really that complicated, is it! Placing blame, choosing sides, getting all of the jots and tittles lined up perfectly, is not at all what Jesus has in mind! Don’t get me wrong. I believe we need to stand up and fight “evil”! But maybe “stupid”, should just be ignored! The controversies don’t help spread the Good News! And finding fault never will! Therefore, we just need to share what we know to be true!

I will never forget several years ago when our Youth went on a trip for Spring Break. One of things we did was attend a Chris Tomlin concert. There were tens of thousands people in a huge auditorium in Kansas City, and millions of dollars in equipment!

There were light crews, and sound technicians, and two giant projection TV's! They filled an entire wall! There were microphones and lights everywhere, multiple drum sets, acoustical and base guitars, three keyboards, and computers that controlled everything! And right in the middle of the concert, with everyone standing on their feet and praising God, as the smoke drifted through the wash of colored lights, and the sound encased the entire arena, the band suddenly stopped this grand production, and zeroed in on the core of our faith!

The music slowly softened. And before we knew it, all of us found ourselves singing along; "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong, they are weak, but He is strong. Yes Jesus loves me. Yes Jesus loves me. Yes Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so." ...Simple Faith! Simple, honest, from-the-heart Faith! And all of God's people said, Amen!

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Thank you, Lord, for listening to our deepest fears. Thank you for always being there when we come before you in prayer. And thank you for creating this safe place where we might lay our burdens down. It is nice to be able to come to you whenever we feel alone. And it is wonderful to know that you will accept us, regardless of the fact that we are not perfect. We truly appreciate the peace and security that is ours just for the asking when we bow before you. And we are eternally grateful for the healing that we receive.

With confidence Lord, it is that overwhelming sense of peace that we ask for right now. Fill us with your Holy Spirit in this time of prayer, as we worship you today in spirit and in truth, and throughout this next week as we witness in your Name. Fill us with your power and with your strength. Pour out wisdom on us, your church, so that we might glorify you in all that we say and do.

Lord, as we have passed through this week we have come to know of some people who need you personally and powerfully right now. In fact there are some folks who need your touch even before we finish this prayer. And therefore, we have come together to lift them up before you. Please be with.....

Lord, we ask that you will keep these people close to your heart, for you know what they need even better than we do. We ask that you will fill them with your Spirit of Life, healing and comforting them as only you can do. And we ask that you will equip us to reach out to them, and help that healing along, while giving all the glory to you as we do.

We ask these things in Jesus' name, as we pray together now the very prayer that he taught us saying, Our Father...