



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

[www.goodshepherdwi.org](http://www.goodshepherdwi.org)

---

**Fourth Sunday in Lent**

**March 30, 2014**

---

**“God’s Work in Healing and Suffering”**

*(John 9)*

Rev. David K. Groth

(Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind)

1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. John 9:1-4

### **Collect of the Day**

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment. You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

This business of spitting on the ground, making some mud with the saliva, putting it into someone's eyes . . . it never sounded like a nice thing to have done to you. It sounds like something my older brothers would have done to me . . . along with the "pink rosie", the "wet willy" and the frequent "noogies". And it sounds also a little like what my mother did to me on Sunday mornings. Some people are cursed with a phenomenon known as a "cowlick," a kind of fiendish swirl at the crown of the head which makes hair want to stand up in a disorderly fashion. It wreaked havoc mostly on Sunday mornings when mom wanted the combed down and neat look. There were times, though, when I could actually feel my cowlick spring into action. My mother would observe it, narrow her eyes and then – I knew it was coming – discreetly wet her fingers at her mouth and administer that primitive styling cream. I don't see this little drama unfolding in the church anymore. Today, the goal is to have hundreds of mini cowlicks all standing upright like a marching army.

In any event, something like that homemade remedy was once administered when Jesus and his disciples came across a blind man. We never learn the man's name. All we know is that he was blind from birth, and that he was a beggar, which makes sense because begging was about the only way a blind man of the day could support himself. Additionally, people believed that illness or handicaps were always a sign of God's displeasure. If you were sick, you probably had it coming to you. God was punishing you for something you had done, or perhaps something your parents had done. To be cured, then, you needed to repent and fast and pray and offer sacrifices. Some even believed it was inappropriate to help someone who was sick, or to seek treatment when sick, for

then you were interfering with God's righteous punishment.

So what do you think? When you get sick, is it because of something you've done? And if you stay sick, is it because you don't have sufficient faith? People will tell you that too, you know. A number of years ago it happened to one of our members right up at Watertown Hospital. She had been visited by a marginal acquaintance, a sort of self-appointed clergy like visit. And after the niceties, he told her, "All you have to do, sister, is believe, and you will be healed." The next day, when I saw her, she was still sick, in fact, getting worse, feeling awful, and now also deeply troubled, wondering whether or not she had genuine faith.

The apostle Paul had a substantial faith, right? And yet, he was plagued by some unknown suffering that he referred to as a "thorn" in the flesh. Repeatedly, Paul asked the Lord for healing and relief. Repeatedly, the Lord chose not to give it. Instead, Paul explains, the Lord let him suffer in order to keep him humble.

Similarly, Jesus healed many during his ministry in Galilee. But he did not heal all. When some demanded a miracle, Jesus rebuked them. He did not do miracles on demand.

There are numerous examples that show God even caused illness among his people. He caused Moses to have a leprous hand to demonstrate God's miraculous power to Pharaoh (Ex. 4:6-7). In Numbers 21 the Lord sent poisonous serpents among his people to punish them. He healed many, but many also died (vv. 4-9). And who could forget the example of Job? He, too, suffered great loss in his family, his health, his fortune. In this case, the Lord allowed Satan to test Job's faith through suffering and ill health (Job 1:6-2:10).

In view of these examples, it is too simple to say that God wants his people to enjoy perfect health. We should not expect miracles on our terms. Illness and healing are subject to God's greater purposes. He allows suffering and brings healing where and when he wills.

And that's a major point in our text. Jesus comes across a man who was born blind. The disciples ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus says, "It was not that this man sinned or his parents." That's not the point. The point is he's sick so

that the works of God might be displayed in him.” With this, Jesus gives us a peek behind the scenes. He’s pulling back the curtains and showing there is indeed a plan and purpose.

“. . . so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Those are important words to anyone who is sick. Those are words that you will want to remember, because with them, Jesus frees you from the notion that your illnesses, your sufferings come as punishment from God. “Don’t be too hasty with your assumptions” Jesus says here. Instead, he introduces us to the great truth that God works his will and good purpose *through* our suffering and loss. Often in ways we cannot see or understand, but God works good through our suffering and loss.

Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud and said to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam. He went and washed and comes out of the pool with perfect eyesight. I say perfect, because I can’t think the Lord would restore him with anything less than perfect. No cataracts, no red/green deficiencies, no macular degeneration, no floaters, just eyes working as God originally designed: a happy explosion of color and clarity.

It would have been just about a perfect day for the blind man, if it had ended here. But now the Pharisees get involved, and they’re already hot because all this happened on the Sabbath. By making this muddy balm and applying it, Jesus was breaking the Sabbath laws forbidding work. And since Jesus broke the Sabbath, he must be a sinner. And since he is a sinner, he must not be from God, and this healing must not be from God.

But there’s disagreement among the Pharisees. Some acknowledge that a miracle has taken place, and sinners can’t do miracles. The Pharisees are divided, so they decide to investigate the event further. They ask the blind man what he has to say about Jesus, and he responds Jesus “is a prophet.” Notice, moments before, he used the word “man” to describe Jesus. Now he uses “prophet.” Something’s happening. Something more than just his eyes are beginning to open.

The Pharisees decide they need to verify this man had indeed been blind. And so they find the man’s parents and begin questioning them. “Is this your son. Was he **born**

blind? How is it that he sees?” The parents are guarded. They know how the Pharisees work. They divulge little and deftly avoid the dispute. “He is our son,” they say, “and he was born blind, but how this all came about we don’t know. Ask him. He’s old enough to speak for himself.”

Since the parents are of no help, the Pharisees turn again to the blind man. “We know Jesus is a sinner. What do you think?” The man knows a trap when he sees one, and he steps around it. “I don’t know about any of that”, he says. “All I know is I was blind but now I see!”

“But **how** did he open your eyes?” the Pharisees demand. That’s when the man finally loses his patience. “I have told you already” he says, “and you refused to listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do **you** want to become his disciples, too?” Predictably, the Pharisees blow their tops. No one talks to them like that. They hurl insults at the man and throw him out of the temple, which means they essentially excommunicated the man. To be cut off from the temple was to be cut off from God. Notice, Jesus healed the man, but that is not the end of the man’s suffering. It’s a new kind of suffering now, a new kind of anguish. And there is, I suppose, a noteworthy lesson in that. We should not turn good health into an idol, saying, “If only I were young and strong again, then all would be well.” No, all would not be well.

Word gets to Jesus that the Pharisees threw the man out of the temple, and we get a little peak at his pastoral heart. He had already done so much for the man. He could have walked away and still, the man would have been forever grateful. But that’s not enough for Jesus. He wants to give him more than just eyesight. So “he finds the man and cuts right to the chase. “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Son of Man” was a common title for the awaited Messiah. “Who is he sir?” the man asks. Jesus answers, “He is the one speaking with you.” This time, the blind man doesn’t hold anything back. “Lord, I believe” and he worships Jesus as God.

Something more than just eyes were opened. In vs. 11, the blind man used the word “man” to describe Jesus. In verse 17, he uses the word “prophet”. There’s progress, but he’s not there yet. A lot of people think of Jesus as a great teacher or prophet, but that’s not yet saving faith. In vs. 33,

he says Jesus is “from God.” And finally, in verse 38, he goes all the way, he holds nothing back. “Lord, I believe” and he worships him. Jesus opened the man’s eyes; he also opened the man’s heart. Not just physically, Jesus healed this man spiritually.

Remember earlier how the disciples asked, “Who sinned? This man or his parents that he was born blind.” And Jesus told them they’re off the mark. God is not like a fussy historian keeping careful records of each transgression so that he can dole out punishment one for one. He is more like a Father who welcomes his repentant prodigal home, forgiving what was past, and restoring us by grace. Our text shows how God works through suffering and setbacks for his greater purpose. Please remember that, because when you are sick, you will be tempted to think of it as the punishment of an angry and just God. And you might also be made to think if only you had more faith, you would be well. That’s what that guy was saying at the bedside of one of our members at Watertown Hospital: you just need more faith. And in one swift stroke he managed to turn the focus of an elderly, sick woman away from Jesus her Savior, and turn it instead inward, to her own wobbly faith. But that’s not where our hope is. Our hope is in Christ as Savior, not in the fickleness of our faith.

In St. Louis, when it was still called “Lutheran Hospital”, every room had a crucifix hanging on the wall, facing the patient, a crucifix with the corpus of Jesus pinned to the cross, dead. Ironically, that’s the message we need when we’re sick, not someone questioning our faith, but the reminder that our dear Lord loves us enough to die for us for the forgiveness of our sins. And he knows what weakness and vulnerability and shame feel like. He knows what it is to be short of breath and to drift in and out of consciousness. And he knows what it is to die. And that death was for you. Through Christ, God made peace with you. He’s not itching to condemn you or anyone else, because Jesus already suffered our condemnation on the cross. His desire is that all should be saved.

Our health, it comes and goes. Our faith can be erratic too. But your status in Christ is secure. You may lose friends, you might suffer a divorce, but your status in Christ is secure. Your job might be eliminated, your investments

might tank, but your status in Christ is secure.

Do not be blinded by popular notions about miracles or suffering. Trust in your Lord. Whatever your health, God is working in your life right now. Certainly pray for miracles. But also praise him when there are no miracles, for your status in Christ is secure. His ‘grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor. 12:9). He created you. He redeemed you. He has called you by name. He loves you and will sustain you through Jesus Christ. Amen.

