

Sharing Your Story

John 9

What a year this week has been. It's hard to believe all of the changes that have happened in just the last week. Gathering size has gone from unlimited to 250 to 50 to 10. Classes at Iowa State went from temporarily online to online for the rest of the semester. Sports were canceled across the world. Every time we think we've got a handle on things, there's more change, more new information.

The man born blind went through a lot over a short period of time, too. His day began as normal, but then a strange man walks by, puts mud in his eyes, and tells him to go and wash. After that, he can see! But that just creates a new set of problems. Some don't believe that a miracle could have happened. Some don't even believe it's the same guy!

The problems get worse once the Pharisees get involved. They question who he is, if he was actually healed, and who he encountered. They bring his parents in, who don't defend their son as much as they could or should. They finally conclude that the formerly blind man must be lying, and cast him out.

The constant theme throughout this passage is that the blind man who was healed just shares his story. He just keeps repeating what happened to him. I was blind, but now I see. He encountered Jesus, and his life would never be the same. He knows what has happened to him. He knows how he's been changed. It's the others around him who can't see what the changes mean.

So what does this mean for us as we are in this strange time of physical distancing? First, the question the disciples lead the story off with; How are sin and suffering connected? For the Jews of Jesus' day, they were very connected. People suffered because they had sin. That's why the disciples ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

We have that same challenge. For some things, it's easy to make a connection. Overeating leads to higher risks of heart attacks and diabetes. Smoking leads to an increased chance of lung cancer. Taking dumb risks can lead to broken arms. Not washing your hands well enough leads to catching whatever germs are going around.

But most of the time, it's not. Cancer strikes people without obvious risk factors. Germs don't seem to care who they infect.

We humans instinctively search for reasons why things happen – particularly tragic things. Part of our human blindness is that we try to see cause and effect in ways we cannot see. As we grapple with things that we cannot understand, like COVID-19, those same instincts come into play. We look for a reason this is happening, we look for someone or something to blame. We try to make sense of something that is hard to make sense of.

But as this passage reminds us, Jesus didn't come to explain sickness or suffering or death. He came to overcome and overpower them. He came to give sight to the blind. He came to find the formerly blind man once he'd been cast out, and bring him into the family of faith. He came to take all the sin and suffering of the world upon himself on the cross.

The blind man, too, doesn't try to explain sickness or suffering. He doesn't try to explain his healing, either. He simply repeats his story. He simply shares how God was at work in his life.

God acts in the face of mystery and tragedy. And so, rather than wasting time trying to figure out the root cause of suffering in a given instance, the important thing is to maintain a humble, repentant attitude, and, like Jesus, to see instances of suffering around us as opportunities for the work of God to be displayed in peoples' lives.

Once those words of God are displayed, we share them. We share our stories of how God is at work. That's all the formerly blind man does. He shares his story. He shares what happened to him. He shares how he encountered Jesus, and how his life was changed. He stays firm in sharing that story

Many of you know that our coordinator of international student ministries, Judy Newhouse, was in Hong Kong for five years before she came here, and she has continued to lead VBS teams there twice a year. Her friends in Hong Kong had shared with her several months ago that they were running low on masks and

hand sanitizer, and so we mailed some there. It's hard to believe that we are in the same situation here now!

At the beginning of March, we received a note from Pastor Carl Hanson, a former ISU student who has been a pastor in Asia for the last twenty seven years, and currently is the pastor of an international church in Seoul, South Korea. He shared how in his church, they had to move to doing ministry remotely. However, there had been some benefits to it, too. With people who had to travel several hours to gather in person, they were feeling even more connected to the church because of the use of technology! As we navigate these changing times, we hope that's an outcome here, as well.

The man formerly blind is cast out. We've been forced out of our building, at least in groups larger than ten, for a time. With more and more churches trying to livestream or post audio or video recordings, the ways you can hear and see these stories is multiplying considerably.

This event has changed us, and will continue to change us. We're encouraged to open our eyes, to see not just if I can catch this disease, but to see how I could be a carrier and infect others. We're opening our eyes to see idols that we had given our allegiance to. We're opening our eyes to see how interconnected we are. We're opening our eyes to see how things need to be changed so we're better prepared in the future.

As we wait for a clearer picture of what the future will hold, of what will be changed forever, we need to look around us. After all sorts of tragedies, a quote from Fred Rogers goes around. "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news," Rogers said to his television neighbors, "my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" Look for the helpers. More than that, open your eyes to see how you can help the helpers. Open your eyes to see who you can help. Open your eyes to the help you need. Open your eyes to see how God is at work.

The good news is that Jesus sees us. He sees us even as we can only see each other virtually. He sees us from the cross. He sees us all in our fears.

Jesus came to make you see! He came to bring light into your life! He came so that the works of God might be displayed in you, that others might see Jesus through you. God is at work, pushing back the darkness of the world, opening the eyes of the blind and bringing light. Through that, we can truly look ahead to when the Light of the World will never stop shining on us.

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