

St. Paul: On The Same page

03.23.14 for Lent 4a

Day One: Isaiah 42:14-21

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. 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.

God promises deliverance to his people Israel who have been wandering in darkness.

As I write this, the radio is playing a saccharine choir piece with lots of harps and bells and soothing sopranos sweetly singing about the love of God. But Isaiah told how God would burst out with his rescue. Like a woman in labor, it says, he would cry out. And laying waste to mountains and hills, God would come.

The blind that he will lead are not just people in darkness, they have blinded themselves. They've followed

false gods and willfully closed their eyes to God's goodness.

But God will lead them, not in flowery fields, but through the cataclysm of his wrath. While all else is being destroyed, he will lead them into the light. Out of the rough and wild places to a level and safe place.

"These are the things I will do," God says. And he has done them. He has reached into your life, and while all else was falling down, he has still led you, guided you, by his word, by his voice.

Too often Christians like to imagine the world a soft and pleasant place. Too often we think that this is the sort of life God would call us to enjoy. That vision sells short what God really does.

With power and great might, amid trial and terror, in the poverty and filth of this world, there is where God works his miracle of grace. In your worst day, that is when God is leading most.

Prayer: *Father Almighty, Judge of all the Earth, come with power into our broken world. Punish the evildoer, and lead your people, the helpless and lost. Lead us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Day Two: Ephesians 5:8-14

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

Believers in Jesus are to be different from the world. We are to walk as "children of the light," that is, as those who can see what is good and right and true. We are to be discerning what is pleasing to the Lord.

What does this mean? We have a tendency to think that if we "expose" sinful actions by talking about them and criticizing them, that then we are obeying God's word here. Paul does say to "expose them," right?

But the apostle's main point is that we are to avoid the same sins. We are not to

take part in them. Instead, we are to live as children of light, and it is the light which exposes things in darkness.

And what light are we talking about? We're talking about Christ himself, who shines on us.

Unfortunately, it is much easier to criticize others, and then to live just as if we were in darkness ourselves. We proudly avoid one sin, but fall for another. We decry homosexual marriage, but we do not show the light of God's grace in our marriages. We decry greed in the rich, but we fail to act with generosity with our own wealth. We lament laziness of some who refuse to work, but we seek more and more leisure time for ourselves rather than time to serve.

We are called to discern what is pleasing to God. Invest any time asking that question and you will see places to change your own life.

Living in the light may involve work – but living in the light is a joy and blessing.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, you healed the blind man. Help me know my own blindness, and find the Light in you. Amen.*

Day Three: John 9:1-41

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. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

The disciples are so quick to judge. That's me. It's so easy to see all the wrong in the world. Have you ever stopped to think that perhaps some of the awful things around us, even things like sickness and poverty, might have a divine purpose? Maybe God intends to be glorified by his servants showing mercy in these tragedies, just as God was glorified by Jesus' healing of the blind man.

But if no one feeds the poor, no one stands for the downtrodden, no one cares for the sick, whose fault is that? God's? Or is it we who have failed to seize the opportunity placed before us to show God's greatness and mercy?

Who sinned? That question might turn out to point in a direction we didn't expect.

Second, Jesus gives this poor man a gift to unwrap. He doesn't just heal him right away. He gives him a simple trusting task. "Go, wash..." And as he obediently goes his hopes must have risen and risen. Surely he was afraid to believe that it could come true. And then he bent to the pool and scooped the water, baptizing his eyes according to Jesus' command. And his life was changed.

What wonders might we see if we obey Jesus' call?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I see all the ugliness of the world and I want to turn away. Help me, like you, to see the dark and turn toward it with the light you have given. Amen.*

Day Four:

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?"⁹ Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man."¹⁰ So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight."¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

How ironic. We marvel at Jesus' miracle, which is so great that the people who are best situated to see it cannot even recognize it. A blind man that they have known well is suddenly able to see, and they say, "It looks like him, but it must not be the same guy."

You know what I'm thinking already, don't you? This is so much like us.

God does MIRACLES in our lives, and we don't see them.

I don't mean the silly things like, "I prayed for a parking spot close to the store and suddenly one opened up." I mean we refuse to see God's

hand in anything that is not what we planned or expected.

It is only a miracle when you get your way? Or is it also God's work when you lose your job, or you go through a fiery trial, or you have a period of doubt and confusion, and then the sun rises and you come out on the other side – perhaps a month or 6 months later – and you find that your faith is stronger, your love for others is deeper, your joy is more profound?

So the neighbors bring in the experts, the Pharisees and religious rulers. And they too are unable to see the miracle. All they can see is the challenge to their own authority, their comfortable job security. At the end of this story, who is able to see?

Only the man who was born blind. The disciples, the neighbors, the rulers, they all thought they could see and so they were blind. But to the one whom Jesus has given sight, all is revealed. That is a truth worth pondering.

Prayer: *Dear Savior, I have been so blind. Open my eyes. Even if the light pains me at first, let me see and rejoice in you. Amen.*