

The Works of God

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Gospel reading. **Jesus said to his disciples, “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”** Here ends our text.

We have in our synod what we call medical missionaries. These are missionaries who travel overseas to provide medical treatment for those in need, some of whom need vision care. For example, Jack and Cathy Carlos serve in Guinea, West Africa, as medical missionaries to the Maninka people. Jack and Cathy are building relationships and sharing the love of Christ with their neighbors in northern Guinea by providing basic health care and eye care. They have a small clinic on their porch where they’re able to serve people with basic health needs, as well as perform eye exams and provide free eyeglasses. Each encounter concludes with prayer. It’s their hope that their acts of service will open the hearts of the people they serve so that they may receive the saving Gospel message of Jesus Christ. In a sense, they’re working to serve their neighbor in both body and soul. Some of the Maninka people who walk away seeing physically with new eyeglasses also walk away seeing spiritually with faith in Jesus Christ.

Perhaps Jack and Cathy Carlos took a cue from Jesus in our Gospel reading this morning. Here we see Jesus first working to heal the eyes of a blind man so he could see physically and then working to heal the heart of the same man so he could see spiritually.

The story begins with Jesus’ disciples stopping in front of a man who was blind from birth and arguing about the cause of his fate. They pointed at the man and asked Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” This was an intriguing debate with arguments on both sides. The disciples reasoned that bad things happen to a person as a consequence of his sin. On one hand, some argued that this man was blind because he himself had sinned in some manner. On the other hand, some argued that since he was born this way before he had a chance to sin that it must have been the sin of his parents. It was a conundrum that sparked interesting debate. But how insensitive this was of the disciples. The blind man couldn’t see, but he could certainly hear. I wonder how he felt to sit there in the darkness hearing these unseen voices speculate about the cause of his affliction. They weren’t treating him as a human being, but instead they merely saw him as a case study like a troop of medical students on a hospital tour. Where was their compassion?

And don’t we sometimes act the same way? We see a person in poor health or poverty and occupy our time debating the cause of his plight. “Is it his fault or someone else’s? He probably brought it on himself. No, he’s just a victim of the world in which we live.” It makes for entertaining banter, but do we ever do anything about it? Do we ever show a little compassion and help him?

But Jesus treated the blind man as a human being made in the image of God. Jesus cared about the man’s body and soul. But before he healed the man’s soul, he first attended to his body. In answer to the disciples’ question, “Who sinned? This man or his parents?” Jesus replied, “Neither, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Though this blind man was certainly a sinner and so were his parents, he wasn’t blind because of any particular sin on his part or his parents. Rather this was the work of the sinful world in which we live - a sinful world which causes physical blindness. But Jesus said, “The works of God are to heal this man in body and soul.” How does God work to do this healing? He works through his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Then Jesus proceeds to do the work of God. He brings light to a dark world. He first heals the man’s body. He stooped down next to the man, spat on the ground, and made some mud. Then he put the mud on the man’s eyes. He didn’t say, “Here’s mud in your eye,” to toast the man’s ailment. But he told him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” The blind man went and washed and came back seeing. Jesus did the work of God by showing mercy and compassion by healing the man’s body.

What was the response to Jesus’ act of mercy? More debate. The neighbors argued, “Is this the blind man who used to beg?” Some said yes, but others said no. So they brought him to the Pharisees. They

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 19, 2023

John 9:1-41

convened a tribunal to investigate this act of mercy. They questioned the man, then they questioned his parents, then they questioned the man again. How did they respond to this act of mercy by Jesus? They said, "This man can't be from God because he broke a rule," one of their rules at least. Jesus was guilty of healing on the Sabbath. No good deed goes unpunished. It's interesting that they never questioned Jesus or asked to hear his side of the story. Instead they condemned him as a sinner without a hearing. And when the man confessed that Jesus must be a prophet sent from God because no one could heal a man born blind without the help of God, what did they do? They kicked the man out of the church. Again, where's their compassion? They should have rejoiced that through this act of mercy this man could now see. Instead they rebuked him and cast him out.

And don't we sometimes act the same way? Someone does a good deed, an act of mercy, a work of service in the church, but "Oh, they broke a rule, one of our unwritten rules." So we convene a tribunal and give them a tongue lashing. Instead of encouraging them, we drive them away. Where's our compassion? How is this the work of God?

But Jesus does the work of God. When Jesus hears that the man has been cast out of the Pharisaical church, he seeks him out and finds him. After healing his body, now Jesus works to heal the man's soul. He asks the man, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Having never seen Jesus with his own eyes before, the man answers, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Then Jesus reveals himself, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." The man responded, "I believe," and he worshipped Jesus. Why did this man listen to Jesus and respond so well? Because Jesus had first opened his eyes. He'd shown him mercy. And then Jesus opened his ears to hear and believe in his Savior. These are the works of God, both to show mercy on the body and to give witness to the soul – to care for both body and soul.

And Jesus does this same work of God for you. He cares for both your body and soul. He cared so much that he gave up his body to be crucified for your sins. He gave up his soul in death to take your punishment. He redeemed your body and soul. And what he redeemed, he continues to care for. We confess in the explanation of the First Article of the Creed, "God has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home . . . He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life." God cares for your body. But he also cares for your soul. He opened your heart to see. The Holy Spirit called you by the Gospel and enlightened you. Just like the man born blind, you now see and believe. You worship Jesus.

But as a disciple of Jesus, you now participate in the works of God. Jesus didn't tell his disciples, "I must work the works of him who sent me." He said to his disciples, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world." Jesus worked the works of God himself during his earthly ministry. He is the light of the world. But now that he's departed this life and ascended into heaven, he continues to work the works of God. He works through you. He says of his disciples, "You are the light of the world. . . Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." You do the works of God when you care for your neighbor's body and soul. You show Christ's mercy and then give witness to Christ. This is part of our Witness – Mercy – Life Together. You can be a sort of medical missionary right here. You build relationships by sharing the love of Christ. You open their eyes physically when they take note of Christ's mercy. And once you've gotten their attention, then you give witness of Christ. "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him." "He is Jesus Christ. Let me tell you about him." You care for his body and soul. We do the works of God in this life while it is day for after we depart this life we can no longer work.

These are the works of God: opening the eyes of the blind through the mercy of Christ to the body, and then opening the hearts of the blind through the witness of Christ to the soul. In these works of God, Christ heals both body and soul. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.