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Lent 4 – John 9:1-7 – Sent

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*“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (John 8:12). Jesus didn’t make too many friends among the Jewish religious establishment when he said that to a crowd of people at the temple in Jerusalem. See, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law considered themselves more than adequate spiritual leaders – guides for the blind you might say – and for hundreds of years they had worked very hard to cast themselves in that light before the people of Israel. So when Jesus said that, they scoffed. How presumptuous! These people already have a light; it’s Moses, and what’s even more, it’s all the improvements we’ve made to safeguard his Law! Moses had Ten Commandments, we’ve got over 600! We’ve told these people what’s right and wrong in every detail of their lives, because the more they know about what God demands of them, the better they can know how to keep it. We’re the leaders of God’s people and the protectors of his Law, so who’s this Jesus to tell us that *he’s* the light of the world?

Maybe they didn’t see who Jesus was, what he did, and the support he had from the Father and from the Scriptures, but one thing’s for sure: Jesus was the light of the world in a way that those Jewish religious leaders could never hope to be. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law knew true light about as much as a blind man trying to describe the brilliance of the sun, but Jesus knew true light because it’s who he was; he made it, and he gave it to everyone who would look and listen. Jesus proclaimed that he is the light of the world, and in our Gospel lesson for today he proved it not just in word, but in deed. Jesus was *sent* here for a purpose: to bring the light of grace and truth that scatters the darkness of guilt and unbelief, and to shine through the gloom of this sinful world with the hope for perfection in eternal life in heaven.

So one Sabbath day, Jesus and his disciples were walking through Jerusalem when they came upon a man who was blind from birth. It was pretty common for disabled people to line the streets begging in those days, but on this day this particular blind man caught the disciples’ attention. They couldn’t help but think what a raw deal this guy got. Going your whole life not being able to see – not only does it make everything you do so much harder, but it also keeps you from appreciating and enjoying much of the beauty of God’s creation. Naturally the disciples thought that if this guy had to suffer a penalty like that, someone must have really done something to put him on God’s bad side. So they ask Jesus, *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”*

What a sad question that was. It showed (to their shame) that the disciples understood their God and the way he works about as well as the Jewish religious leaders did. Yes, this man was born blind, and yes, that was tragic for him. But Jesus used this opportunity to teach them that this man’s physical condition wasn’t so important as his spiritual condition, because more than anything *that’s* what Jesus came to fix. *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life... While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”*

There’s a lot of darkness in this world, Jesus knew that full well – and we do too, because nowhere is that darkness blacker than in the sinful human heart. Sometimes Jesus the Light of the World can seem more like a sudden flash that burns our eyes in the middle of the night, because a lot of times those same sinful attitudes come just as naturally to us as they did to the disciples or the Pharisees – and we don’t like having them brought to light any more than they did, either. It’s easy to look down on someone else when things go wrong and pass judgment on them. Even when you have no idea what their situation is or how they got there, it’s easy to assume the worst. It’s easy to turn our heads or turn up our noses when people around us are suffering, rather than sympathizing in love and helping where we can. Too often, whether we do it consciously or not, we can act just like those Pharisees as if *we* are the light of the world, rather than Jesus.

No, for anyone who looks at themselves and their lives with that kind of attitude, the Light of the World isn’t the soothing light at the end of your tunnel; he’s the freight train coming your way. That’s what the Jewish religious leaders found out. But that’s not what Jesus was *sent* to be for us. Thank God that Jesus came here not to destroy us, but to save us. He came to be the light of life, and by his grace, that’s exactly what he was for that blind man, and that’s exactly what he is for us who believe in him. Jesus came into this world to dispel the darkness of sin and death and to burn up the cloud of guilt that hangs over all of us, and he did that when he hung on the cross in darkness like night and uttered those earth-shattering words, it is finished, and gave up his spirit for us. Right then, as the night of death closed in on him, the light of salvation broke like dawn on this world and burned its way into our hearts, and that is a light that will never die or set or fade. Our Savior Jesus Christ, the light of this world, did away with our night of fear and doubt and uncertainty, and he brought us instead forgiveness for our sins, assurance that God is our gracious Father and one day we’ll see his brightness face to face, and he brought us the light of heavenly perfection and eternal life.

So now that's what we see at the end of our tunnel – we see the Light of the World waiting with open arms to welcome us into our heavenly home. That's the kind of hope that Jesus offered to this blind man in our story for today. And we need that kind of hope too, because even though we always keep our final goal in focus, our journey through the tunnel that is life in this sinful world can still be awfully dark and scary and difficult sometimes. We fall into sin every day. We hurt the people around us, or vice versa. Tragedy strikes. Health fails. The devil attacks us from every direction, and it can seem like God is nowhere to be found.

But it's at those times when the Light of the World shines brightest for those who look to him. When the darkness creeps in, the Light of the World is there to conquer it and destroy it. This man who was blind from birth – I'm sure he had some of those bad days when he wondered what he did to deserve this. And if he didn't, then a lot of people had those thoughts for him. But there are two things from this man's life that Jesus wants to shed light on for us here: first, God works for good in this world even through tragedies and difficulties, and most of all, one day he's going to fix everything that's wrong with us and everything around us.

The disciples wanted to know what caused this man to be born blind. They assumed the worst about him and his family. But Jesus instead showed them that what's important for us about all the bad stuff that happens in this world isn't the cause. It's the purpose and the hope and the greater good that God can bring from it. Jesus said, *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me.”* Bad things happen in this world because of sin, but it's not the way God works to smite people, to strike people down with specific punishments for specific sins they commit, and it's certainly not the way God wants us to work to make backwards assumptions that because something bad happens to somebody, they must have done something bad to deserve it. No rather, our God uses the bad that we go through here to turn our hearts and minds towards deeper things – toward spiritual things. Every bad thing that darkens this world, like a man being born blind or whatever you've had to go through that's made your heart ache and that's made this world seem just a little bit dimmer – God uses those things to bring you closer to him and to strengthen your faith in him. He uses those things so that his people can love and care and sympathize with each other. And he uses those things most of all to focus you that much more clearly and strongly on the Light of the World that calls you out of this darkness toward himself and toward all of his goodness and grace.

And that's really the ultimate thing God wants us to know about this dark world – one day it's going to pass away, and we'll be with him in perfect peace and joy forever. Jesus said, *“While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”* Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ‘Go,’ he told him, ‘wash in the Pool of Siloam’ (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.” What Jesus did for this blind man was a little foretaste of heaven. Jesus really was for him the Light of the World – spiritually first of all, but then also physically. At the same time that Jesus brought the light of faith and forgiveness into his heart, he also gave him the gift of sight. Just as God created the first man out of the ground perfectly in the beginning, so the Son of God re-created this man's eyes from the ground perfectly here. Jesus turned on the lights, so to speak, so that this now formerly blind man came to see Jesus as his true Savior – for his soul, for his body, for his everything, and for eternity.

Jesus healed this man born blind to show that he is God himself who entered our story for our good, who was *sent* into our broken world to make it all right again. And that's exactly what he's going to do for us, too, when he takes us home to heaven and when he raises us up on the Last Day. Jesus was *sent* into this world to defeat death and the devil, and when he rose again on Easter morning he *sent* away our sin and all its consequences. So that means that even though we may still have to put up with this world's hurts and troubles for a little while yet, the day is coming when every bad thing we've ever known or experienced will fade into black and all we'll see is the light of our salvation. Then everything will be perfect, like it was always meant to be; you'll never have to suffer under sin or any of its damaging effects ever again, because Jesus suffered for them in your place and he promises you now that whatever you still have to go through here will be nothing in comparison with the joys you'll have on the day when your souls are *sent* by faith to be with him in heaven forever.

No, Jesus didn't pull any punches with these Jewish religious leaders. They continued to mock him and continued to reject him that day and in the months to come, so finally, some of Jesus' last words to them here were these: *“For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind”* (John 9:39). That's a little scary, because there's a little part in all of us who needs to hear that. But for us who believe in him, know that that judgment isn't for us – it's for the devil and everyone and everything that stands with him. Jesus was *sent* not to be our judge, but to be our Savior. He was *sent* not to bring us destruction, but to heal us and to show us his goodness. And he was *sent* not to cast us into darkness, but to be the Light of the World and our Light of grace and truth and hope that will shine for us and on us into everlasting life. Amen.