

"How To See"

John 9:1-41

March 26, 2017

Fourth Sunday in Lent

How do you see? Even though the Gospel reading deals with a man who was physically blind, my question is not about how he or anyone else sees with their eyeballs. I mean: how do you see the world operating? How do things happen and why? Many see the world operating through the prism of karma. Karma is a very popular way to see things. Even though this philosophy comes from Hinduism and Buddhism, I believe many Christians believe in karma, too. If not believing in it, most have heard of it.

What is karma? It's the idea that what goes around comes around, that there's a kind of justice that's running the universe. If you do bad, you get back bad. If you do good, you get back good.

There's two kinds of karma. First, there's bad karma. I saw a YouTube video in which a man in a pickup tailgates a woman who is filming his every move. He finally passes her, while triumphantly giving her the one finger salute. And just after that, his truck spins out of control and goes in a ditch. There's karma for you – the kind of karma you don't want to get. He got what was coming to him.

But there's also good karma. You've probably heard of the "pay it forward movement." Somehow, if you buy a cappuccino for the guy in the car behind you at the drive through at Starbucks or you pick up someone's tab at a restaurant, that is going to bring you you good karma and sets in motion the universe in your favor. That's the kind of karma you want to get.

In our text, while Jesus was walking along, He saw a man blind from birth. And the disciples ask the karma question: "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" In other words, whose fault is this? Who, by their sinful behavior (or bad karma), caused this?

This is the kind of question that we like to ask – the kind of question that helps us make sense of the world. We always want to establish a direct cause and effect for bad things. If something bad happens, then there must have been a specific reason. A man has cancer? Well, it must have been because he smoked for over thirty years. Liver problems? He must have drank too much. Heart attack? He must not have followed the right diet or exercise regime. Car accident? He probably drove too fast. There must be a reason for everything.

So, why was this man born blind? What is because of his sin? Or was it because of his parents' sin? The right answer to the karma question is this: While some behaviors have specific consequences built into them, the evil we see in the world is the result of sin. While we may be able to avoid some of the bad things in this world some of the time, death is going to get each and every one of us, no matter how well we live and no matter how righteous we think we are. We've all sinned and suffer because of it. Even creation suffers. The world and everything in it is broken because of sin.

Now all of that is true, but Jesus doesn't go with the easy "text book" answer. He goes beyond that simple answer. He says, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." Stop and think about *that* for a second. A specific sin has not caused the problem of blindness for this man. Rather, sin in general with all of its negativity has actually set in motion a chain of events that allows God to work, bringing, not disaster, but mysterious blessing. How is that possible?

We see it happening in the case of the blind man. The Son of God comes to him in grace and mercy. He does not come to the Son of God by virtue of any good works or good karma. The man is blind to the world and to God, undeserving of any good thing. Instead of getting what's coming to him, that is, some sort of rejection or punishment, the blind man receives what should not be coming to him, that is, Jesus' healing of his blindness. Jesus uses weak and humble means to accomplish powerful and glorious results. He spits on the ground, makes mud, anoints man's eyes with it, and

sends him away to wash it off in the Pool of Siloam. The man, responding in faith, goes and washes and comes back, able to see for the first time in his life time. The man believes in Jesus and worships Him.

In the same way, no matter how bad the circumstances in our lives seem to be, we are not victims of bad karma or anything else like that. Instead, our sin, guilt, death, and damnation, with all the pain and suffering they cause, have set in motion a chain of events which allows God to work, not to bring disaster, but glorious blessing.

The Son of God came to us in human flesh with grace and mercy. We did not come to Him by virtue of our good piety, our good works, or even our good karma. In our sinful condition, we were blind to Jesus and His grace and mercy. We were undeserving of any good thing from Him. Yet, out of grace – God’s undeserved love for you and me – Jesus showed mercy to us and cured us of the blindness of our sin.

Jesus uses very weak and humble things to accomplish powerful and glorious results for us. He set aside His use of His divine power and allowed His body to be hung on a cross as the sacrifice for all sin. He anoints our souls with His precious blood for the forgiveness of our sins. He sends us, not to the Pool of Siloam or any other body of water to be washed and cleansed, but to the font that we might have our sins washed away by the waters of Holy Baptism and become fully and completely clean. Our eyes have been opened. By faith, we see our Lord Jesus, believe in Him, and worship Him. Instead of getting what’s coming to us – what we deserve, we receive that which we do not deserve: the grace of God and all the blessing that comes with it.

We don’t have to depend on good karma or worry about bad karma to influence and control on our lives. Karma is all about justice and, because of our sin, the way of justice always condemns us. Instead, we have the grace of God in Jesus Christ. That’s all about His love which forgives us, accepts us, and cares for us.

Does that mean we never have to face suffering or pain? Does such suffering and pain negate God’s grace? Not at all. It was never God’s plan that man fall into sin. It was never God’s intention that there should be suffering, pain, and death, or that men would be born blind.

And yet, in the mystery of His grace, in the Lamb slain from the creation of the world (Revelation 13:8), our Lord took a fallen situation and not only restored it, but made it better than it ever was. By the mystery of the incarnation and the glory of the cross, and the power of the empty tomb, we have come to see God, with open eyes, as we never could see Him before: face-to-face, in full and sacrificial love. A paradise even better than Eden awaits us. Having been loved that much, forgiven that much, and saved that much, what else can we do but fall to our knees in worship?

We rest confidently and assuredly in this great love by which God has taken us creatures and turned us into His children. He is in control and will be with us and care for us in good situations and bad. We have no reason to fear.

The world, on the other hand, in its fear of bad karma and desperate hope for good karma, still hasn’t found what it’s looking for. The world in all of its worldliness is blind. The world looks at the baptismal font and doesn’t think it’s worth a bucket of spit. The world looks at the Table and doesn’t think it’s worth much, nutritiously or spiritually. But we, whose eyes have been opened, see a crystal fountain, a river of life flowing from the throne of God, and the Lamb who has been slain which leads us to the wedding supper of the Lamb where we will join in a celebration that lasts forever.

So, while karma may sound cool, I’ll stick with grace. Karma offers only fear and uncertainty. Grace guarantees peace and assurance. And that answers the question which we started with. How are we to see? Always see the world and everything in it through the prism of grace. You will find comfort in the bad times. You will experience joy in the good times. Karma can never do that. But the grace of God in Jesus Christ always will. Amen.