Text: John 9:1-41

**Introduction**

For my money, our gospel text today has the most ominous words in all of scripture. Although I don’t think they jump out at you, unless you are listening. They can stream right past in the sweep of the story.

**Text**

Jesus is passing by which is another interesting bit of scripture that we don’t really have time to get into today. In passing I’d encourage you to look up “passing by” or “passed by” in scripture. Great mysteries are revealed when God passes by.

Jesus is passing by and he sees a man blind from birth. And Jesus’ disciples have a question. Their question is based on the assumption of most times and places – just not our time and place. Most places assume that bad fortune is attached to bad behavior, and likewise good fortune to good behavior, that the moral calculus has to balance. Whether you call it Karma or getting what you deserve, it’s our natural thinking. And even looking at things like a man born blind, or the evil rewarded, doesn’t seem to break our natural attachment to it. We’d rather posit something like reincarnation or generational debt to balance the Karma than admit creation doesn’t work on our moral calculus. So, Jesus’ disciples ask their question, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

Now our society largely rejects karma or what comes around goes around. But I think that is simply because of our Christian hangover. It takes the things it likes from Christianity – like no karma – while rejecting its mysteries, the harder things it is based upon. Jesus does correct the disciple’s understanding, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents.” It’s not about karma or moral calculus. It is not about our sense of fairness. When God passes by things aren’t fair. And this is the great mystery. “It wasn’t him or his parents who sinned, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

This adult man, blind for what 20, 30 years, maybe more. This man was blinded by God for those years, for this moment. When God passes by things are not fair. He’s God. He does what he wants. It is all his choice. You don’t have to worry about karma. You don’t have to worry about coming back as an ant for a bad life, neither do you have to worry about did you do enough to level up. Neither is within your ability.

**Christology**

This is the mystery of election. It is the mystery of grace.

We might not want Karma, but most people certainly don’t want grace and the absolute loss of control that it means. The radical dependance upon the work of God.

Although Jesus does give us an invitation to be a part of that work of God. “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day, night is coming, when no one can work.” Even the Son is bound to that Will of God. He was sent. And He must do the works he was sent to do. Those works include that cross for us, the fountain of God’s grace given to us. And right now, in this world under the cross, is the time of grace. Right now, while Christ is in the world – which he is through this body of Christ – is when we have the light to work. A day of clouds and deep darkness, a day of judgement comes. A day when the justice of God is revealed for all. A day when the Lazarus’ receive recompense and the rich their reward. But right now, while Jesus in in the world, is the day of grace.

And we are invited to be part of the work of grace. We must work the works of him who sent us.

**The Path of Grace and It’s Rejection**

And I think the rest of the story that John tells is just as much the story of a miracle. It is the story of grace working on our hearts. Although that grace works in two ways.

Let’s contrast the path of the man born blind and that of the pharisees.

Within the Pharisees there is a division. They all have seen the effects of Jesus passing by, the man born blind sees. But some of them are offended at what God has done. “He doesn’t keep the Sabbath.” God doesn’t follow our rules. He’s not fair. He can’t be from God. While another group simply asks, “do you have eyes to see? How can a sinner do such signs?”

The grace of God always brings about a division. When the cross enters our lives we are set on one of two paths. There is the path that accepts the work of God in our lives. Or the path that rejects it.

Those pharisees ask the man born blind an important question, and it will be a question that keeps coming up. “What do you say about him, since he opened your eyes?” And he answered them, “He is a prophet.” I think this is often the first step on that path of grace. Our eyes have been opened. But our confession is simply that Jesus is a prophet. He’s the one who brought about our seeing, but we are not willing to admit the miracle in that. Jesus as just the prophet. The grace doesn’t come from him. It just is and he’s led us to it. There are lots of ways that we can relegate Jesus to “just a prophet”. And it feels like a way to honor him. But ultimately it isn’t true enough. Lot’s of people can say “Jesus is a prophet.” Islam says that. Many people have tried to reduce Jesus to a great teacher. Jesus is a prophet, but the confession of Jesus as a prophet is an unstable place for the soul, because it puts all the work on you. Have you followed the right prophet? How do you know?

The pharisees pull the man born blind back a second time. And this time we see a solidification of beliefs. The pharisees are sure that Jesus is a sinner. The man is just as certain that can’t be, because he now sees. They know that God spoke through Moses. The Man just keeps insisting on what Jesus has done for him and how it refutes what they are saying. The Pharisees know that this is not how God acts. And this brings forth a second confession from the man – “If Jesus were not from God, he could do nothing.”

More than just a prophet. How do we know? We know from what Christ has done for us. That cross. How do we know? We know because he comes from God. This is a step that the world, those who have rejected the grace of God, cannot accept. They will cast you out. But it is also a necessary step of grace. To know that God does work in this world, on us.

But even there, the confession is not perfected. Jesus hears that the man has been cast out. And Jesus asks him a question, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” That Son of Man is Jesus’ unique term for the messiah. And the man, after Jesus has revealed himself to him, confesses Jesus as this. In walking that path of grace we come to know our savior more completely. And more importantly we believe it. The grace of God has come to us by the cross. And Christ has opened our eyes to his work. And invited us to be part of it in this age of grace.

**Conclusion**

The same event was seen by both the man and the pharisees. Even more so the same event would be seen by all the world. The Son of Man lifted up on the cross…and raised on the 3rd day. Everyone has had their eyes opened to the work of God in this world. How God has offered his grace freely.

Yet there are two paths. The formerly blind who see the Son of Man in his full glory today. And those who claim to see clearly today, who are blind to the Son of Man. On that last day, everyone will see the Glory, on that day that completes what Jesus says “for judgement I came into this world.” But today is the day of grace where that judgement is worked out.

Today is the day to let the grace of that cross guide you in all your ways. Amen