

While preparing for this morning's worship service, I struggled with whether to read the whole story or to skip around and give you the "cliff's notes" version of the healing story. In the end, I decided that the best thing to do was to give you the entire story because it is too powerful to break up into little pieces. There are too many great parts in this story to try and decide which ones stay and which ones to leave out. I must admit that I LOVE this story of healing. It is such a powerful story about a man born blind who is given his sight by Jesus. Reading through this story, it dawned on me that this man doesn't do anything to earn Jesus' healing. The blind man doesn't ask Jesus to heal him. He doesn't confess a faith in Jesus Christ at first. Jesus simply walks up to this man, spits in the ground, rubs mud on his eyes and heals this man. Now, one could argue about the semantics of this story. Was he healed when Jesus rubbed the mud on the blind man's eyes, or was he healed when he followed Jesus' directions to go to the pool and wash off his eyes? We may never know the answer to that question this side of paradise. For some, the answer to that question changes the meaning of this story. Is the blind man healed solely by God's unmerited grace or is he healed by his faith? Here's what I do know about this story: unprompted by this blind man, Jesus restores his sight. And in response to this healing, the man proclaims Jesus' Lordship and bows down at Jesus' feet. It is a powerful story about God's grace and this man's gratitude for God's grace. So much of what we do and who we are is directly attributed to God's grace. God's grace is the bedrock of our faith, of our lives and our very beings. God's grace is, dare I say it, quite amazing.

This morning I want to spend some time discussing how God's grace is truly amazing, and how we must learn to rely upon God's grace more in our own lives. Specifically, I want to focus on two parts of this morning's story. First, God's grace is poured out on us, even when we don't ask for it and especially when we don't deserve it. Second, we are called to respond to God's grace with gratitude. So, let us journey together through this passage, shall we?

First, God's grace is poured out on us, even when we don't ask for it and especially when we don't deserve it. That is, after all, the definition of grace, isn't it? We receive God's favor even though we don't deserve it nor do we ask for it. We don't hear this man begging Jesus to heal him of his blindness. We don't even hear if this man knew who Jesus was before Jesus spits on the ground and rubs mud on his eyes. All we do know about this man is that Jesus shows up and heals him in a powerful and dramatic fashion. He didn't deserve to be healed, at least not as much as any other person deserves to be healed. Jesus healed him in order that others might see Jesus' miracle and believe. We learn from Jesus that he heals this man as a signpost, a guide, a map pointing people back to Jesus. It is out of God's grace that this man is healed.

So often, we are like the disciples, wondering what people did to deserve the bad things that happen to them. We might even think that we have sinned and deserve the bad things that happen to us. But in this story, Jesus rejects the narrative that this man sinned and deserved to be born blind. He focuses their attention away from placing blame and towards the miraculous healing. I think, especially now when it can so easily seem like everything is going bad, we tend to try and focus on what bad thing we did to deserve this or what we did that caused this bad thing to happen, because if we can figure out what we did wrong, we can try and fix it. But this story reminds us that we need to turn our attention away from placing blame and figuring out who caused what to happen and turn our attention to seeing God's grace in the midst of all the bad stuff happening. No, I'm not saying that God caused the Corona Virus on us to punish us or to use it as an opportunity to turn our attention towards God. Viruses occur in nature and it's no one's fault. I'm saying that Jesus rejected such talk in this morning's lesson. Rather, in today's passage we see Jesus focus the disciples' attention back on God and the grace of God in the midst of tragedy. God's grace can make the blind see. God loves you and will not abandon you, especially in light of everything that is going on in the world. We can see God's grace in so many ways. Mr. Rogers once said that his mother used to remind him in the midst of tragedy to look for the helpers. There you can find God's grace. God has not abandoned us. We are not alone.

This brings me to my second point. We are called to respond to God's grace with our gratitude. I don't know if you noticed, but throughout this passage, the blind man changes how he refers to Jesus. He starts by calling him, "a man named Jesus." At one point, he refers to Jesus as a prophet. And then says that Jesus is from God. Eventually, this man calls Jesus Lord and worships him. He responds to Jesus' grace by worshipping him. The natural response to God showing up in our life is not by ignoring Jesus.

Rather, our natural response to God showing up is by responding with our very lives in worship. The Westminster Catechism summarizes this point this way, “What is the chief in of [humanity]? The chief end of [humanity] is to glorify God and to enjoy [God] forever.”

I don't know what is going to happen over the next several days and weeks. It seems like every day, sometimes by the hour, things are changing. Things can be very scary right now. I don't know about you, but I'm struggling to sleep well at night. We are all under a great deal of stress. It can be hard to see God's grace and to respond to that grace with our gratitude right now. You need to take time to relax in the midst of all of this. We will continue to be the Church together. At 11:15, we will have a fellowship time on Zoom. This will be a time for people to check in with each other and have human contact. I will continue to have worship on Facebook Live for the time being. People are caring for each other in the midst of all this stress and anxiety. Take time to enjoy the simple things right now. God is still with us. Get up and go wash you eyes and look for the ways that God's grace is showing in your lives and give thanks to God for that grace. Amen and amen.