

Unexpected Expectations – Sunday, March 22, 2020

John 9:1-12

¹ As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We^[a] must work the works of him who sent me^[b] while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷ saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I wonder if any of you have walked a road this morning. Any other day, I would expect such activity, but today, Jesus might be the only one walking very far. And with Jesus on the road today we find Pharisees and followers of Jesus; disciples and those healed by Jesus; beggars and wealthy; parents and children; lost and found people of God all on the road together this morning. Yes, my friends, I wonder if any of you have walked a road this day. If not, then today we simply follow Jesus as he walks - and maybe that is enough.

The story of Jesus healing at the pool of Siloam is a story of God meeting all the expectations nobody had. The man born blind was a beggar. The disciples notice the blind man – we do not know if Jesus saw the blind man or not. In keeping with the beliefs and traditions of the time, the disciples believe that the blind man or his parents must have committed some great sin in order that the man would suffer blindness as punishment from God. And so they ask Jesus to explain the man’s blindness. I wonder if you are beginning to see descriptions of the Coronavirus as a punishment from God in your social media feeds or hear about it on cable news programs or God forbid lumping all people of Asian descent into a gathering storm of racism because they virus first appeared with strength in the county of China. If you are seeing or hearing any of those conversations, please hear me, our God does not work like that. Not since the story of the flood and the snake bites during the exodus has God offered such punishment for unfaithfulness. I think Jesus gets tired of having to explain how much God loves us – and yet, again and again, Jesus keeps explaining and often chooses to show us God’s love through moments of healing – just like we hear about today.

The pool of Siloam was the water source for a good portion of Jerusalem. Not unlike the story of the woman at the well last week—where people from all over the region would come to draw water, much of the lower half of Jerusalem would have to come to this pool to draw water for the days needs of cooking and other chores. Large water jugs would be in the arms of women and children who made their way to this pool of life. Today, the pool of Siloam, offers sight to the blind. Jesus spits in the dirt – creates mud – rubs it on the eyes of the blind man and sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam. And after he washes, the blind man is sent into the world to proclaim the power of God in Jesus Christ – even as the healed man could not explain how the healing happened.

I am convinced that we are living in this time of expectation nobody had just months ago. Expectations we have never seen. Schools closed. Malls closed. Roads open and little traffic to contend with as some of us still head into work. Clean air as the smog lessens. Less costs for gas even as we have little use for our vehicles. I am grateful that the coronavirus begins to slow its hunt in countries where it once exploded on the attack. And here in the United States and in other parts of the world – we are slowly coming to terms with reality. The politics are less of a concern to me now that the virus continues to spread. Now my hope is that as the government responds – so, too, do each of us as individuals respond to the needs of our neighbors – which means we check in by phone and email and text and leave items on doorsteps if need be to help someone get through this time. For me, this individual’s response is one of faith.

God, I am trusting you, that the world will keep turning. I remember the words of Isaiah 48, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”

God, I am trusting you that you are tending those who are sick and those who offer care – those on the front line in hospitals and first responders entering into people’s homes. I am reminded of the words of 2nd Corinthians 4, ⁸ *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;* ⁹ *persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*

We have much to ponder in these days as our routines are reshaped out of necessity. Lucky enough for us, we also are finding we have far more time to reflect – to reach out – to tend – and to pray. And for that time, I give thanks to God. In the past week, I have made phone calls to old friends I have not spoken to in months if not years. I played games with my family on a Wednesday night. We have eaten dinner as a family six nights in a row – I cannot even remember the last time we had dinner together that many nights in a row. And every night as we have gathered around the table, we prayed together. And that, my friends, is enough – truthfully, God's got the rest.

I cannot stop the virus from spreading except in small ways by my own actions. I cannot stop people from getting sick or dying – but I can pray for those who are sick or compromised or afraid. I cannot change the expectations that continue to bombard me – with regard to quarantines and teaching my children at home (with the help of the most amazing teachers) and shelter-in-place rules that may or may not come. I can, however, give thanks for this life. For family. For friends. For technology – that allows me to communicate God's love and peace with each of you. For every breath and every moment where I am reminded that God loves me just as God loves each of you. It is true, God is meeting all the expectations nobody had this day. I wonder are you paying attention to the little details of these days. The return of the cardinals and robins to trees around us. The greening of grass. The rise of green stems of tulips and daffodils. For me always a sign of the promise of resurrection. My friends, new life is coming. As it has been promised to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – new life is coming. You only need to look for moments of resurrection joy all around you. This, each of us can do. There is hope for everyone. Like the blind man who was given back his sight by the hand of our Savior, so too, has God given to each of us the promise of seeing new life. If only we will lift up our heads and open our eyes and trust the promise of new life made again and again by our God.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Thanks be to God! Amen.