

Sermon Draft

Text: John 9:1–41

Sermon: “By Grace”

We are moving closer to Holy Week, when we will gaze upon the Passion of our Lord. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus’ final miracle is the healing of blind Bartimaeus, who, upon receiving the gift of sight, follows Jesus as he makes his way to the cross. This morning we hear from John’s Gospel of another blind man given sight (John 9:1–41). In the *Old Testament Reading*: ***“And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them”*** (Isaiah 42:16).

Bono, the lead singer of the band U2, is considered larger than life by many. Along with his successful music career, he’s also known for his humanitarian work, especially fighting AIDS in Africa.

Asked what drives him, what makes him tick, Bono answered, "It's a mind-blowing concept that the God who created the universe might be looking for company, a real relationship with people, but the thing that keeps me on my knees is the difference between grace and karma.

Karma is the idea that what goes around comes around, that there's a kind of justice that drives the inner workings of the universe. You might have caught a video some time ago, gone viral. In it, a man in a pickup truck tailgates a woman, and then passes her, while triumphantly displaying his middle finger. And no sooner after passing her with his middle digit in the air his truck spins out, and he crashes into a ditch. Ah, there's karma, and people love it. He got what was coming to him.

As the Bono puts it, "You see, at the center of all religions is the idea of karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you; an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; in physical laws every action is met by an equal and opposite one."

In our Gospel today we have Jesus walking along and he comes across a man born blind. And the disciples asked the karma question, "Who sinned? This man or his parents?"

And this is the kind of question we're comfortable with, the kind of question that attempts to make sense of the world. A man has cancer? Well, yeah, he smoked for over twenty years. Kidney or liver problems? Drank too much. Heart attack? Bad diet or not enough exercise. Car accident? Drove too fast.

So, why was the man born blind? Was it because of his sin? Or perhaps the sin of his parents?

I know what I'd say to the karma question, and it wouldn't be the karma answer. I'd say that one common sin infects us all. Sure, certain sins have specific consequences, built into the way the world functions, but 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 may be.

We've all sinned and all creation suffers. The world is broken. Now in the seminary if this answer, along with a quote or two from Pieper or Walther, and would get you an A in dogmatics. But Jesus doesn't offer a simple dogmatic answer. Instead, he says, ***"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him"*** (v 3).

Now that's an even better answer. Sin, in all its negativity, has actually set in motion a chain of events that ends not with disaster, but with mysterious blessing. Bono added, he is holding out for grace; believing that Jesus took his sins onto the cross, because he knows who he is, and on his own he is in trouble and has no hope. We can say the same.

Remember, it was never God's plan that man fall into sin. It was never God's intention that there would be illness and death, or that men would be born blind.

And yet in the mystery of his grace, in the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, 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, we have come to see God as we never could before: face-to-face, in full and sacrificial love. A paradise better than Eden awaits us. I know I often when praying about death say that we will one day get to return to the beautiful Garden but actually what awaits us is better.

We have experienced a love that has been tested, a love that has been challenged, a love that goes beyond a mutually beneficial relationship. And having been forgiven much, what can we do but fall to our knees?

Yes, God loves the angels. But the angels are good. And it's easy to love those who love you in return. Even the pagans do this. But we have received a greater love. We have been shown a more beautiful grace.

He has taken us creatures and turned us into children. And no, the world still hasn't found what it's looking for; for the world in its worldliness is blind; the world looks at the baptismal font, and think it but just another piece of furniture. But we, who have been washed in its waters and made brothers and sisters in Christ, see a crystal fountain, a river of life flowing from the throne of God, and the Lamb who has been slain.

Bono's right. It's a miracle that the God of the universe is seeking out the company of folks like us. But that's what he's done. What happened to the man born blind? Well, we know he became an outcast. His own parents distanced themselves from him, and the community ostracized him. But our Lord went the extra mile and sought him out. Our Lord took friendship and mercy and turned it into full communion.

So, yeah, karma sounds cool. But today, I'm with Bono. I'd rather have grace. We'll never be rock stars, or at least I won't but we can join together in another band and sing together the song of the Lamb, the song of love unknown.

Amen