

# Sermon for Sunday, March 26, 2017 - "What God Does"

Fourth Sunday in Lent  
March 26, 2017  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passage for the day.](#)

## What God Does

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

"Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Whose fault is it? As Jesus is walking along, he sees a man who was born blind. His disciples, however, are unable to really see the man. They see a problem and want to find someone to blame.

Who is to blame? We want to know.

Who's to blame for the fighting this morning as families tried to get to church on time?

Whose fault is it that the marriage ended, that a child is struggling?

Who is to blame for institutional failings, for the polarization in our country?

Whose fault is it?

When things are hard and confusing, there's some sick satisfaction in at least having someone to blame. Identifying fault gives us some sense of control. Jesus' response to the disciples' question doesn't really help matters. He responds, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

That sounds like maybe it's God's fault.

As if God made him to be born blind so that God could do something impressive? Is Jesus saying God causes suffering so that God can fix it and look good? Hmm ... that doesn't really help, Jesus.

There may be a translation problem.

The Greek translated here as "he was born blind **so that** God's work might be revealed" can also be translated "he was born blind, **as a result**, God's work might be revealed." So maybe Jesus isn't saying the man was born blind **so that** God could show off. Maybe he's saying the man was just born blind but now, since that happened, God's works can be revealed.

I like that possible translation more; it helps me with questions about God's role in suffering even as it raises others. But what helps more is that Jesus doesn't blame anyone. He doesn't try to explain God. Instead, Jesus does the work of God. Jesus sees the man; Jesus gives him new life; and Jesus finds the man again after his community drives him out. Jesus does God's work of seeing, recreating, and searching out all God's beloved children.

In Jesus, we are given God's response to the suffering of our broken world, to all our attempts to blame and find fault. There are always so many unanswered questions about God's role in suffering, so many things we don't and can't understand. Yet in Jesus, we see God's response to all the brokenness. God, in

Jesus, comes near to us and gets into the dirt with us, God sees us, recreates us, and finds us again and again.

Jesus sees the man born blind when everyone else sees only a problem. Jesus stops and takes note; he doesn't just pass by the man. Throughout scripture we see that God sees human suffering, God pays attention. God doesn't just pass by us, God notices. And God calls us to see others not as problems, but as children of God.

Then, Jesus spits on the ground, makes mud with the saliva and spreads the mud on the man's eyes. Jesus gets his hands dirty and gives the man a new start on life.

The way Jesus acts here has echoes of the second creation story in Genesis 2 - when God got down into the dirt to form human beings out of dust and give us life.

This is what Jesus does for the man born blind. He uses dirt to create sight and then gives the man new life by providing him with a sense of purpose. In his day, blindness would have prevented the man from most work and forced him to spend his life as a beggar focused on survival. Jesus changes all that by giving the man not only eyesight but also a mission. Jesus directs the man to wash in the pool of Siloam, which we are told means "sent." The man is sent to witness that Jesus is sent by God. This provides him with purpose and hope.

We too are recreated; we too are given purpose and hope in Jesus. Sometimes this is as dramatic as a physically blind man being given sight. Much more often it is that our eyes are opened to how unhelpful it is to assign blame; our eyes are opened to God's life-giving presence with us in the muck of our world. Our eyes are opened to really see the people around us and to recognize the ways we can make a difference in a broken world.

The blind man is given new life and purpose and we are, too. However, the community is unable to accept what Jesus does for this man. It is too disruptive to their religious answers and their attempts at control. Essentially, they blame the man born blind for challenging them and they drive him out of the community.

But Jesus seeks the man out and finds him. Jesus invites him into a deeper relationship and the man confesses his faith in Jesus. Others didn't notice the man when he was blind and couldn't deal with him when he could see. Jesus goes out searching for him. In Jesus he is found, he finds a home, and he is drawn close to God.

This, too, is what Jesus does for us: Jesus is the Good Shepherd who is always searching for us and always drawing us into relationship with God. When we feel lost - without purpose, without nurturing relationships, when we are stuck in patterns of fault finding - we are not alone. The Good Shepherd is still looking for us to draw us close to God.

In a world with lots of blame to go around, in a world full of suffering, in the midst of questions and doubts, Jesus does the work of God. Jesus sees us, gives us new life, and searches for us again and again. When we are loved this deeply and profoundly, we too can do the work of God. Such love frees us from the need to find blame and sends us to see, love and search out others.

Let's take a moment to pray. Our time of prayer will continue into the introduction to the hymn, #452 Awake, O Sleeper, Rise From Death.