

## So Many Questions (John 9:1-41)

In John 9, we start with a question, based on an assumption, which leads to other questions.

“Whose sin caused this man to be born blind?” the disciples ask. Whose sin meant that he would live life begging on the side of the road? Jesus’ answer points in another direction. The man was born blind so that we might see God’s works through him. This may raise more questions for us about cause and effect. Did God cause or allow a child to be born blind so that he could later make a cameo appearance in the Gospel to illustrate a point about a lack of spiritual vision?

Such a literal reading of Jesus and the situation gets in the way of appreciating an extended metaphor about the capacity of human beings to deny what is right in front of us. In this story, the local religious leaders in particular hold on to their principles instead of opening the hearts and minds to the Messiah in their midst. Their questions start to feel like swats taken at

## So Many Questions

page 2 of 9

a pinata, intended to break the people they question and to get the answers they want. What would it mean for them to accept the testimony of the man born blind?

A church I read about had members who complained about communication that went beyond poor to pathological. People in leadership in this church seemed determined to misunderstand each other. Questions were asked. The church had a history of shameful actions by a pastor and secret-keeping for the sake of saving face in the community. Despite their collective effort to preserve the church's reputation, the leaders felt suspicious of each other. They grew accustomed to their unhappiness. The problem was exacerbated by an unusual number of people in leadership who lived with significant hearing loss. They literally could not hear each other.

On the fourth Sunday of Lent, they read this story together in worship, printed with parts for the

## So Many Questions

page 3 of 9

congregation. A man who had been deaf read the part of the man born blind. The leaders of the church took the parts of the Pharisees. That day, they began to listen more closely. In the weeks and months that followed, they began to work harder at hearing each other, although communicating better disturbed the status quo.

It is not an easy choice to change. The religious leaders in John 9 could not see who Jesus was, although he stood right in front of them. They did not want to know him. They had questions, but they did not want his answers.

We might want to ask ourselves these questions: Whom do we not want to hear? Whom would we rather not see and know? What does that say about how we understand Jesus? Why was he born? He was born Jesus that God's works might be revealed in him, for all of us to see. He was born Christ that God's work of love might be known in him.

Who sinned? From ancient times to now, illness and disability have often been attributed to sin—usually the sin of an individual. Science and medicine offer alternative explanations, and so does Jesus. But the question still stands. In shamanic traditions, illness was considered evidence of disordered relations in a community, whether the community was aware of it or not.

Let me stop here and explain “shamanic traditions.” Shamanism is a religion characterized by belief in an unseen world of gods, demons, and ancestral spirits responsive only to the shamans—priests who use magic or divining for the purpose of curing the sick. Healing meant more than curing an individual body in the modern Western biomedical sense. Healing in “shamanic traditions” and in the culture of first-century Palestine meant reaching wholeness whether or not a cure was achieved. Healing meant restoration to a sense of belonging in one’s own skin and in

## So Many Questions

page 5 of 9

community. Healing reached beyond individuals and individual bodies.

So, again, who sinned? The question still stands today. When Black people in America are disproportionately affected by diabetes and hypertension, who sinned? When whole neighborhoods are without a grocery store, who sinned? When millions lack access to health care they can afford, who sinned? When residents of Louisiana's "cancer alley," home of the most toxic air and water in America, watch their environment and the bodies decay, who sinned?

Certain Pharisees thought that Jesus had sinned, having violated the sabbath on a technicality. When they ask Jesus, "Surely we are not blind?" Jesus confirms that they are not. They aren't blind because they have seen what is possible. They have seen healing that goes beyond the simple cure. They have seen healing that means wholeness for individuals

## So Many Questions

page 6 of 9

and communities. They have caught a glimpse of the kingdom of God, and yet they try to hold it back. Like Jesus, Reverend James M. Lawson Jr. often said, “We don’t have to live like this.” And we don’t. Thank you, God, for healing that goes beyond a cure. Thank you for sight to see beyond what is and to behold what is possible.

Let me now comment on **two** things in today’s Gospel story that have always fascinated me. **First**, there are the *six stages of the blind man’s spiritual sight*. The **1<sup>st</sup>** stage is him seeing Jesus as a man. The **2<sup>nd</sup>** stage is him seeing Jesus as a Helper or a Healer. The **3<sup>rd</sup>** stage is him seeing Jesus as a prophet. The **4<sup>th</sup>** stage is him seeing Jesus as the Savior. The **5<sup>th</sup>** stage is him seeing Jesus as being “from God.” And the **6<sup>th</sup>** stage is seeing Jesus as the “Son of God.”

So, the blind man, having received his sight, went from knowing Jesus only as man who commanded him to

## So Many Questions

page 7 of 9

do certain things, to reaching the stage of belief and worshipping Him as the Son of God.

The **second** thing that also fascinated me about this story was his parents' answer to the Pharisees' questions about their son: "Is this your son? Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" Their answer was: "But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself."

They were not going to get caught up in any games the Pharisees were playing. They feared being excommunicated and being banished from the synagogue. Remember that the synagogue was the social life of a Jew at that time.

So, what are the lessons we can learn from this Scripture reading from John?

## So Many Questions

page 8 of 9

Key lessons from this passage include suffering as a platform for God. Hardships are not always punishment; they can be opportunities for God to display his power. Because Jesus is the light of the world, He brings spiritual illumination, allowing people to see truth, while his missions also cause judgment on those who reject him. Spiritual blindness is a choice as seen by the Pharisee's refusal to acknowledge the miracle, due to rules and pride, which also demonstrates the spiritual blindness is often willful. And finally, courageous testimony asks believers to confidently share their personal experiences of Jesus' grace, even in the face of opposition.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Holy Jesus, we confess that we fail to question our own sightlessness. With the poultice of your love, cure

So Many Questions  
page 9 of 9

this blindness. Open our eyes to our own misunderstandings, faults, and failure. Lord, also open the eyes of our hearts. As we receive the mud paste of your grace to cover our blindness, may we see others differently and follow you in a new way. Give us spiritual sight to discern your presence and guidance in our lives, and help us understand your ways even when we do not see the full picture. Give us the courage to witness to others about Your power and love, just as the blind man testified, even when faced with opposition or challenges. We ask this in the name of Your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ, **Amen.**