

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

'For a long time I have held my peace; I have kept still and retrained myself.'

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There is a man born blind. The disciples ask, *'who sinned, this man or his parents?'* It is a good question, asked by good men. They assume that God punishes no one who does not deserve it. They do not believe in the problem of theodicy, that is, the question of why there is suffering in the world.

The Lord does not answer as one would expect. He does not exculpate Himself and His Father; He does not accuse either the man or his parents of sin. Rather, He takes responsibility for this blindness, this suffering, this sin. *'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'*

Now the Christ spits upon the earth. Now He makes of it clay of dust and breath. Now He sends the blind man to a pool, called Siloam, that he may bathe in its waters. And behold, the man sees.

Dust and breath, water and sight. Darkness and light. *'The works of God must be displayed in him.'* What is the work of God? That He creates, for God is above all else Him who creates.

Therefore, of this malformed man, this blind degenerate, the Lord fashions a new man, whole in nature, and perfect in form. And how does He do so? In the same way He made the first man: from dust, and water, and from the breath of His mouth.

Behold the Christ, the creator of heaven and earth.

This man, born deformed, is now blessed to be the first among the newly formed.

Such is to the glory of God, for such is the glorification of man, and God glories only in the salvation of His creation.

Yet something else is shown here. The Lord answers His disciples that He must *work while it is day, for night is coming. Day and night*, which He made, but in a different way than He made man.

Man was formed by bringing separate things together, first earth, then water, then breath. All else was made by division, *the light from the darkness, the day from the night, the waters below from the waters above, the land from the sea, the creatures of the sea from the birds of the air, the kinds of all animals, one separated from another*. For this reason, in the days of Abraham, God was called *El Shaddai*, a contraction meaning, *the God that said 'Stop'* or the God that set the boundaries. That is, the God who separated.

There is another thing which this God separated: the seventh day from the other six. The Sabbath from the days of labor.

On this Sabbath day did our Lord perform this miracle of recreation. On the Seventh day, the day of rest, did Christ work, that a man born blind might see.

Therefore, in the eyes of the Pharisees, he is counted among sinners and tax collectors, for to them *'this is not a man of God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.'* A commandment of God, the third commandment, with only the commandments to worship and pray to the one true God above it.

The Pharisees and those pious Jews who follow their tradition are scandalized, and with a mixture of confusion and malice, they scrutinize the man born blind. Yet this man does not care. He knows only that he now sees, and seeing, he is declared a disciple of Christ. Yet *the Pharisees reviled him, saying 'We are disciples of Moses.'*

Now the man born blind has been made whole; what was lacking has been brought together in him. But in this, Christ continues His work, His work of dividing. In fact, He begins to accomplish that final work of separation: to separate those who will believe in Him, from those who will reject the Son of Man.

'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and

those who see may become blind.'

He comes *'bearing a sword'*, to *'set fire to the world'*. For even fire is a work of creation, for it separates the pure element from the dross.

On the Seventh day, man is to rest, in imitation of God. Yet God, seeing that His creation had been defiled by Satan, did not rest, for God was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for God. Therefore, He shall not rest. In Christ, He shall complete His most holy work, the work of salvation, the work of judging the nations, and setting apart those made holy through the waters of regeneration, through the font, through His blood; the work of making *all things new*.

He shall separate the Church from this unbelieving world. The wheat from the tares. And in so doing, bring all that He had begun in the beginning to its final cause and perfect end.

Those *who see*, that is, those who, trusting in human reason and tradition, in modern fashions and post-modern rhetoric shall forever revile the *blind*, that is, we who no longer walk according to the enlightened minds of this age, but according to the source of all light that cleaves the darkness, the Christ, *the light of the world*, the ever blessed.

The day of Our Lord's Passion approaches, wherein He shall be mocked, reviled, hated, spat upon, laughed at, derided, scorned; and as we await this day, we, who were born blind, shall embrace all such hatred and derision, such mockery and ridicule, with Christian resolve. They shall separate themselves from us, the so-called seeing casting out the so-called blind; yet, by heavenly water, the water of Siloam, we are not cast out, but set apart, made holy; and never shall we despair that we are condemned by the world as foolish and blind, for so we are. For night will come, when *no one works, and:*

'The Lord will lay waste mountains and hills.' But:

'The Lord will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known, He will guide them. And the darkness before them, he shall turn to light.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 42:14-21; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41.