

The Light of Life

Every now and then people will ask me about the candles in church – why that one is so big – or why we only light some of the candles for some services – questions like that. The simplest answer is that all candles – regardless of size, color, or number – are used to remind us that Jesus Christ is the Light of the world.

God, through His Evangelist St. John, repeatedly reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world – that the light shines in the darkness – that He is the light of life.

A lighted candle reminds us that God is with us here and now – not in some detached way – but in the person and work of Jesus Christ – through His Word and Sacraments. A lit candle is like a big flashing sign that reminds you “God is at work here.”

The sad reality is that many people are blind to this truth – and even we who gather here regularly – forget it, or don’t think about it. It is a great mystery – one that must be revealed to us again and again – and for that, candles can be a helpful reminder.

In our text, Jesus comes right into the midst of a man who was blind from birth – a man who could not see Jesus. We get no other description of this man. He could be just about anyone. And in truth, he is no different than anyone of us – for we are all sinners from the time of our conception – which means, we are spiritually blind from birth.

When Jesus’ disciples see this blind man, their first question is – “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Isn’t that our initial reaction? Who’s responsible? Who’s to blame. And yet, the Scriptures tell us that – “there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

But there is something else going on here. Why are we so determined to figure out “who sinned”? Isn’t it because we think that blindness, or any other tragedy or suffering, is God’s punishment for sin? If someone gets cancer, or dies in a car wreck, or loses their house in a fire – is God punishing them for some sin?

If so, then what was Jesus doing on the cross? Didn’t He take all sin as His own – suffer the punishment and death that it deserves – and redeemed every last bit of it by shedding His holy precious blood, and giving up His life into death?

Dearly beloved, Jesus Christ is the Light of the world – working in this world and in our lives while it is yet day. He shines His light on this matter so that we no longer live in the darkness of false belief, doubt and despair. “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

Like a candle burning in church – this man, blind from birth – will show forth to all that God is at work in the world, and more precisely, in this man’s life. The light of Christ will shine. God will do His work. But will anyone see and believe?

Fixing our eyes on Jesus (as we’ve been singing in the Gradual throughout this Season of Lent) – we see the work of God displayed. Just as “in the beginning” when God formed the man from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life, and he became a living being – so now Jesus spits in the dust, forms the mud, and anoints the man’s eyes.

To borrow some language from the Small Catechism – “How can spit and mud do such great things?” Answer: Certainly not just spit and mud, but the Word of God in and with the spit and mud does these things, along with the faith which trusts this Word of God with the spit and mud. Which is that Word of God? Jesus says to the blind man – “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” So he went, and washed, and came back seeing.

To this creature both physically and spiritually blind from birth – Jesus comes and re-creates his eyes – giving him eyes that see, as never before. The light of the world shines into his life – so that he who once lived in darkness – now lives in the light of Jesus Christ.

The works of God are displayed in this man. The light shines in the darkness – but His own people do not receive Him. When the Pharisees learn of this miraculous re-creation – they can’t see past the notion that Jesus has broken the Sabbath Law (by working on the Sabbath – making mud on the day of rest).

In their darkness they fail to see that Jesus is the Lord who comes to provide rest for this man, wearied from the hardships and destruction which sin has brought into God’s “good” creation, and into his life.

But the “work of God” is not yet done – for when they throw this man out for confessing that Jesus cannot be a sinner – Jesus comes and finds him. He will not let this man live with the false notion that he is a sinner who is cut off from the Lord.

Jesus comes, asking – “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “And who is He, sir, that I may believe in Him?” the man responds. And Jesus says to him – “You have seen Him, and it is He who is speaking to you.”

This man can now see the man standing before him, speaking to him – but he was still blind when Jesus came and anointed his eyes with mud. Now he sees this Prophet – this One who has given Him a rest that the world cannot give – this One who re-created his eyes so that he might no longer live in darkness.

With the “eyes of faith” – he now sees the Son of Man, His Savior – Jesus, who has come to him and displayed His work in him.

Dearly beloved, in the words of Isaiah the prophet – “Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see!” With “eyes of faith” – see the Lord Jesus Christ who comes to you this day, standing in your midst – at work recreating you.

With His water and Word He washes you – cleansing you from all your iniquity. With His Body and Blood – He gives you rest from the burden and guilt of all sin.

Jesus, the light of the world, shines on you – so that you may walk as children of the light – so that you may live by faith in His re-creation and His Sabbath rest – not only in this dark world, but even unto life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.