

“On Trial”
Acts 23:1-11
John 9:1-7, 24-29
Rev. David Hutchinson
Sunday, March 22, 2020

There is a disability continuum - - called TABS.

Anyone ever heard of it?

TABS stands for: “temperament and atypical behavior scale”.

It is a sliding SCALE - - or continuum - - evaluating disability.

It suggests that disability is not an either or thing.

Instead each of us is vulnerable - - more or less.

Either by circumstance, disease, accident or age...

Another way to put it is that we are ALL - - “TEMPORARILY ABLED”.

Think about that for a minute:

We have certain abilities, physical attributes, possibilities...temporarily.

We have some of them - - while we live - - for a while.

But it's ALL - - temporary!

Anyone think they know what I'm talking about?

What it means is - - our ABILITIES ARE NOT - - OUR identity!

We are - - each one of us - - a complex combination.

And one of the things that make us up is our ability, age, condition, and so on...

It changes how I feel about people around me - - to think this way.

We all know that in our future - - things can change any time.

We go from what we THOUGHT was normal - - to the next new normal...

This current virus situation is the obvious example.

And it's important when we look at the Biblical text from John for this morning.

It's important because John chapter 9 is commonly known as the story of the man born blind - - who regained his sight after Jesus healed him - - by putting mud made with spit - - on the man's eyes. / The man born blind. / That's how we refer to him.

But if you actually look at the original GREEK texts - - the judgment about his blindness as a way to reveal God's intentions for us - - it's NOT there!

What I'm talking about is John 9 - - verses 3 and 4.

The Bible in our pews is a pretty good translation most of the time. But in this case not so much. / The NRSV says that, Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

In the NIV translation it says, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life".

But this thing is - - the judgment about his blindness was added by translators.

A BETTER translation would be this:

"Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; but so that God's works might be revealed in him, we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day."

Do you see the difference? / In this last translation there is NO sense that he was BORN BLIND for some reason. / God didn't MAKE him blind - - to show us something.

He WAS born blind - - but that's another matter.

What is important is that he reveals God to us. Period.

And he does that - - through his belief in Jesus.

He does that because he has a relationship with - - and trusts Jesus.

But the people around him want to give some meaning to his blindness.

The people around him want to CONNECT - - his blindness with SIN of some kind.

And then to see him as HEALED and restored.

He is the DISABLED one - - and then he is returned to NORMAL - - in this way of thinking. / And being NORMAL is the goal - - and THAT is what God's work is about!

Or - - not.

Jesus doesn't put him on trial. / So why should we?

Jesus says his SIN is not the point.

The works of God are the point.

And the works of God - - are there for ALL of us to do - - for NOW.

That's what Jesus says: Daylight is TIME LIMITED.

NOW is your chance to connect with God.

Because NIGHT is coming - - and then it's too late.

And everything no matter how bad is an opportunity for God and faith to shine.

Jesus said: "I am the LIGHT of the WORLD".

And then Jesus restored this man's eyesight.

But the most important thing about him is NOT his eyesight.

It's his FAITH in Jesus.

All the so called religious people around him are SKEPTICAL of Jesus.

They put Jesus on trial. / They call Jesus a sinner for healing on the Sabbath.

And they put this MAN on trial. / They call him a sinner for being blind.

And they want everything to be THEIR way.

But this man - - BELIEVES in Jesus - - and rejects their way of - - SEEING things.

And since Jesus won't call the BLIND man a sinner - - the blind man won't call Jesus a sinner either! / When he was on trial - - Jesus stood up for him. / And then when Jesus is put on trial - - he stands up for Jesus. / And THAT is how he reveals GOD.

Over and over they ask him about Jesus in order to trap Jesus and he says "I don't know".

But the thing is he DOES know.

He knows ALL about Jesus.

And over and over the authorities say, "We know this, and we know that..."

But this thing is - - they DON'T know.

They don't really know - - the first thing about Jesus.

This man who Jesus heals - - reveals GOD - - by standing up for Jesus.

He reveals God - - NOT - - by being given his sight back - - by Jesus.

He reveals God - - by his belief in Jesus - - when the going gets tough.

When belief is on trial - - will we believe?

THAT - - is the question - - in this chapter of John.

A similar dynamic is at work in the book of Acts.

In Acts - - Paul is on trial before religious authorities.

This is after Paul has made THREE journeys - - all over the Roman empire - - all the way from Jerusalem to Athens and Corinth and back - - three times - - setting out for YEARS - - in order to establish new churches. / He has been thrown in prison and escaped. / And all the time Paul had been a WITNESS - - to WHO Jesus really is.

For Acts that meant:

Jesus - - as the messiah of God.

Jesus - - as the fulfillment of ancient Jewish prophecies.

As Paul returns from his third journey - - his friends warn him NOT to go to Jerusalem.

They tell him that the authorities are out to get him.

Because they don't believe what Paul is saying about Jesus.

Paul goes on trial before a council of Pharisees and Sadducees.

And then he goes on trial before Felix the Roman governor.

And then the high priest Ananias bring charges.

And Paul appears before Festus.

And all along people keep passing the buck on convicting him.

And EVENTUALLY - - he appears before King Agrippa.

And Agrippa - - finally - - declares him INNOCENT!

Why?

Because the Roman authorities really don't CARE about religious matters.

They don't care at ALL - - who Jesus really is - - as long as his followers follow the law and act as submissive Roman citizens - - and support the government.

But Paul - - WANTS to go on trial.

He even rejects this INNOCENT verdict - - and appeals to Rome.

If his case is tried in Rome - - before the Emperor Caesar - - that will matter.

Paul wants his trial to matter - - because it is NOT about HIM!

Paul's trial - - is about Jesus - - and who Jesus is.

For Paul - - this trial is about the ultimate truth - - and revealing God to the world.

When faith is on trial - - will we have faith?

Again - - that is the question for us - - from this text in Acts.

Whatever TRAILS we face - - will we have faith?

As I read these Biblical texts - - the courage of Paul - - and the courage of this man born blind - - jump out at me - - and will not let me go. / They inspire me to try to be more courageous in my own life - - when I face a TRIAL of some kind.

Life WILL be full of trails and challenges.

Life WILL be full of sacrifice and struggle.

And it WAS for Jesus.

And Jesus - - will not abandon us - - when that happens.

So - - as we think about how we might be a little more courageous in our faith...

Listen to this description of a trial - - by Debra Spencer.

This is called, "At the Arraignment"

"The courtroom walls are bare - - and the prisoner wears a plastic bracelet,
like in a hospital.

Jesus stands beside him.

The bailiff hands the prisoner a clipboard...

and puts his thumbprint on the white sheet of paper.

The judge asks: What is your monthly income? *A hundred dollars.*

How do you support yourself? *As a carpenter, odd jobs.*

Where are you living? *My friend's garage.*

What sort of vehicle do you drive? *I take the bus.*

How do you plead? *Not guilty.*

The judge sets bail - and a date for the prisoner's TRIAL.

He calls for the interpreter so he may speak to the next prisoners.

In a good month I eat, the next one tells him. *In a bad month I break the law.*

The judge sighs.

The prisoners are led back to jail with a clink of chains.

Jesus goes with them.

More prisoners are brought before the judge.

Jesus returns and leans against the wall near us - - gazing around the courtroom.

The interpreter reads a book.

The bailiff - - weighed down by his gun - - stands with arms folded, alert and watchful.

We are only spectators - - careful to speak in low voices.

We are so many. If we make a sound, the bailiff turns toward us - - looking stern.

The judge sets bail and dates for other trials, bringing his gavel down like a little axe.

Jesus turns to us.

If you won't help them, he says, then do THIS for me:

Dress in silks and jewels and then go naked.

Be stoic and then be prodigal.

Lead exemplary lives, and then go to prison and be bound in chains.

Which of us - - has NEVER broken the law?

I died for you - - a desperate extravagance - - even for me.

If you can't be merciful - - at least be bold.

If you can't be merciful - - at least be bold.

The judge gets up to leave.

The stern bailiff cries: "ALL RISE!!"