

Who did this? (John 9:1-41)

It's a question I ask my children all the time.

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Who sinned?

As a parent of three young children, I often find myself asking this. Of course, I never say it like that. It's more like, "Which one of you is responsible for this?" Or, more likely, "Who did that?" I want to know which one of the kids left the light on, or moved my car keys, or dumped all of the well-sorted LEGO sets into a single pile of intermingled bricks. I want to know which child I need to talk to about it, because I want to be able to gently correct their behavior.

It is this question that drives the narrative in John 9. Seeing a man who was born blind, the disciples ask Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" But their intent is different from mine: they aren't looking to offer correction. Instead, they see the resulting effect, blindness, and assume that blame must be placed somewhere.

In the ancient world it was customary to assume that every effect had a cause, and that this cause must be somebody's fault. Blindness isn't simply unfortunate; it must be a punishment for someone's transgression. There is no movement in the disciples' question toward correction or hope. There is simply the desire to know where to place the blame.

Jesus, however, is not interested in their question, or at least not in the same way. First, Jesus declares that the man's blindness is not the result of sin, neither his

parents' nor his own. Second, Jesus moves the question away from past causes and toward future possibilities. The man's blindness becomes the opportunity for Jesus to show forth the glory of God.

It is tempting--even for us enlightened moderns, we who see so well--to assume that when something bad happens to someone, they must have had it coming. They, or we, must have done something to deserve this. Often this just isn't true. When we focus on attempting to discern the root cause, we trap ourselves in the past. But Jesus moves from the future, bringing God's possibilities into our present reality. For Jesus, the point is not to determine why we can't see; the point is to open our eyes.

When cancer is diagnosed or a job is lost, our default is to assume some fault of our own. And perhaps there is fault--but that is no place to live. Jesus comes to free us from the past so that we can live with eyes opened to God's future. Blame and punishment are not part of God's kingdom. They only keep our eyes shut to what Jesus is up to.