

March 26, 2017 – John 9:1-42 & Ephesians 5:8-14

One of my finest moments as a father came at a time when my daughter wasn't even born yet. No, it occurred almost a month before Emi was born. When I went to have her car seat inspected.

Car seats are a technological marvel of baffling complexity. And for close to three hours I sat and read through every page of the car seat's manual. I sat and read through every page of our vehicle's owner's manual. I stood in the bitter cold of our garage and struggled with latches and straps and seat belts and little level indicators in locations that are impossible to see.

And after I was done, the seat was installed and secure and I was ready to have it checked by a professional. Because even after all of that, I still had no idea if I had done it right.

But as it turned out, I had. In fact, the inspector at the hospital was thoroughly impressed by it. Not only by the quality of my installation, but also by the fact that when she asked me questions about why had done things one way and not another, I was able to repeat back to her the instructions in both the car seat manual and the vehicle manual that had led me to do it that way. “You actually read the manuals?” She asked with a disturbing degree of surprise.

Yes, I read the manuals. It's my daughter's life we're talking about here. This isn't some bookshelf that I'm slapping together. It's a car seat. It's there to keep her safe. I'm going to take it seriously.

But since then, I have begun to realize that the safety systems and preventative measures we have in place nowadays for infants and children are always complex. Every bit of it engineered down to the tiniest detail so that no one gets hurt. I don't even try to understand how most of this stuff works. On a good day, the best I can do is read the instructions and do what I'm told.

Maybe that's why I'm also a pastor. Because as much as I like technology, I love the way that God works. Because he's always so simple. So ordinary. And yet, so very extraordinary.

Take our Gospel lesson for today. This account starts off with a rather profound question. The disciples see a blind man. A man who is known to have been blind from the day he was born. And, in keeping with what the Pharisees have been telling the people for years now, they come to the conclusion that God wouldn't have afflicted this man with blindness except as a punishment for sin.

It's a simple enough conclusion, but it has a number of holes. For example, how could this be true if he was born blind? Did he sin in the womb? Or maybe it was his parents who had sinned. That could be. But what sin could they have possibly committed that would cause God to punish their son? And why would God do that anyway? What purpose would that serve? Things are getting very very complicated.

And so Jesus stops them and says, “No, no, no, no. You're making this too complicated. He's not blind because anybody sinned. This blind man stands before you today... so that I can heal him. Watch.” And Jesus makes some mud, slaps it on the guys eyes, tells him to wash it off. And *poof* he can see. Ordinary mud. Ordinary water. Ordinary actions all around. And the problem is solved. Simple.

So simple, in fact, that no one can believe it. They're absolutely dumbfounded. The Pharisees drag the poor guy before them twice to ask how Jesus did it. They drag the guy's parents in to make completely sure he really was blind. They even consider charging Jesus with “working” on the Sabbath because they just can't believe that healing him could be as simple as spitting on the ground and scooping up some mud.

The only person who gets it is the man who was healed. When they ask him how Jesus healed him, he says simply, "He put mud on my eyes and I washed, and now I see." When they ask how Jesus did it, he says, "Um... he's a prophet?" In other words, I don't really know how it happened. All I know for sure is that, through Him, God acted and I'm healed. What more do I need to know?

He's right. And yet, more often than not, we tend to think more like Jesus' disciples and the Pharisees than like the man who was healed. How often have you seen someone suffering and thought in the back of your mind, "What did they do to deserve that?" How often have you seen someone whose life just keeps spiraling downward and thought, "They've gotta be doing something wrong." How often have you yourself had a bad day or a bad week or a bad month or a bad year and thought, "God... are you punishing me for something?"

Now, don't get me wrong. There are consequences to our actions. And sometimes we do things that come back around to hurt us. And if you're experiencing some hardship right now that you can trace directly back to some sinful thing that you did. Then yeah, this might be your own fault.

But truth be told, there's an awful lot of suffering around us that has no cause other than the fallen world in which we live. I just read an article in the news this past week. Two-thirds of all cancers have no discernable cause. They're not the result of anything we did or ate or breathed. They're not even hereditary. They're completely random. They're the result of an imperfect world with imperfect bodies. That just get sick and die.

Yet, for some reason, we want to blame God for something that isn't his fault. Make him responsible for causing something that, in reality, he just wants to heal. Like those disciples, who stood there blaming God for blinding this man while, at that exact moment, God was standing right in front of them ready to heal him.

The ways of man are complicated and twisted and perverse. And you can read every how-to book and instruction manual on the planet trying to figure out what you're doing wrong and still find yourself right back where you started: a sinful person living in a sinful world who needs a savior.

But the ways of God are simple. Even ordinary. Ordinary mud. Ordinary water. Ordinary actions. Leading to an extraordinary healing.

We see the same thing happen every time a child is baptized. Because there again... ordinary water. Ordinary words. Ordinary actions. Leading to an extraordinary healing.

My daughter's life will be filled with highly engineered safety devices. Technological marvels that I will struggle to assemble and use every single day. And none of them will ever be as important as the plain water I poured on her head the day she was baptized. Because that water protects the one part of her that I can't touch. That water heals the one part of her I can put a band-aid on. That water gives life and growth to the one part of her that I can't feed.

Holy Baptism is the simplest, most ordinary safety measure I will ever give her. Because it's the one that comes from God. And for that very reason I don't need to have it inspected. I don't need to worry about whether I did it right. God keeps his ways simple so that we can't get them wrong. God keeps his ways simple so that we know that he is doing the work.

Paul himself spells that out for us in our Epistle. He says, "For once you were in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light." Notice the order of operations there. Once you were dark. Now you are light. Live as light. We get that wrong sometimes. We think we need to live as light to be light. But we aren't the light. Jesus is. He told us that today. "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." And he is with us always, to the very end of the age.

We are light because he has made us light. And yes, we need to live as his children. As children of the light. And yes, that's sometimes complicated. Goodness, righteousness, and truth are complicated things in a world of darkness.

But being a child of the light. Being a child of God. That's simple. That's as simple as saying to someone who's asleep, "Wake up, sleeper." It's as simple as Jesus declaring to Lazarus, "Rise from the dead." It's as simple as sitting in darkness and suddenly seeing Christ shine on you. It's as simple as mud and water. As simple as water and the Word.

God's ways are simple. We try to make them complicated because we try to make them about us. But they're not. Emi did nothing to deserve that baptism. Just as you and I did nothing to deserve Christ's light on us. Salvation doesn't need an instruction manual. It only needs a God who's willing to save. Amen.