

A Story to Tell

John 9:1-7, 13-25, 35-41

January 17, 2021

This sermon was inspired by King Duncan’s sermon, “*You Have a Story to Tell.*” There was an Associate Professor of Sociology of Religion at Emory University. Her name was Nancy Eiesland (1964-2009). She was born with a congenital bone defect in her hips and underwent numerous surgeries and experienced tremendous pain throughout her life. She lived all her life with the disability. She wrote a powerful book called, “*The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*” (1994).

In that book she writes: “Growing up with a disability, I could not accept the traditional interpretations of disability that I heard in prayers, in Sunday school, and in sermons. ‘You are special in God’s eyes,’ I was often told, ‘that’s why you were given this painful disability.’ Or, ‘Don’t worry about your suffering now—in heaven you will be made whole.’ What would it mean to be without this knowledge? My disability had taught me who I am and who God is. My family frequented faith healers with me in tow. I was never healed. People asked about my hidden sins, but they must have been so well hidden that even I misplaced them. The theology that I heard was inadequate to my experience.”¹

In this book, she points to the scene where the risen Christ invites his disciples to touch his wounds.² She writes that the risen Christ still had the wounds. He was not healed. The resurrected Christ is revealed as wounded and disabled God. He was not cured or made whole. His injury was part of him. The wounds of the resurrected Christ were not a sign of divine punishment or an opportunity for healing. It is just part of him.

The passage we read this morning is the story of Jesus’ healing of a man born blind. Seeing the blind man, the disciples asked Jesus, “Why was this man born blind? Was his blindness caused by his sins or sins of his parents?” It was their view that the pain and sufferings in life were punishments for the sins people had committed. But Jesus said, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned. This happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him . . .” Jesus’ statement provided a healing for the blind man’s soul. He realized that his disability was not a curse or a punishment for the sins of his family. This probably

¹ Lectionary Commentary: “Ray Charles and John 9 — Seeing for the First Time” (for Sunday, April 3, 2011) by Carl Gregg in *Patheos* March 26, 2011. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2011/03/lectionary-commentary-%E2%80%9Cjohn-9-seeing-for-the-first-time%E2%80%9D-for-sunday-april-3-2011/>.

² Luke 24:36-39.

was what he always wanted to believe. But no one agreed. However, with Jesus' declaration, this blind man must have felt vindicated.

After saying this, Jesus spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. Then he said, "Go, and wash it off in the Pool of Siloam." So, the man went and washed, and came back with sight.

A well-known professor in the field of management once said: "There's some pain that needs a solution, and some pain that needs a story."³ Jesus gave the blind man both a solution—physical healing—and a story—that he was not disabled by some sin that he or his family had committed.

In life, many people, perhaps many of us, carry around certain pains for which there is no solution. It could be an unanswered prayer, or a burden we did not deserve. We ask God for a solution. We plead him for a deliverance. What if God gives us a story instead?

Would it be possible that we could be an example of the love, the strength, the power and the grace of God the Almighty?

We often think that our weakness, our pains, our sufferings make us less of a witness for Christ. However, walking in faith through our pain is what causes others to see God's glory in our lives.

Sheila Walsh is a best-selling author, Christian singer and former co-host of *The 700 Club*, a Christian television program. She struggled with depression for many years but hid it very well. She had spent much of her adult life in a ministry role. She believed she had to portray herself as strong Christian who is always calm, collected and composed. She could not dare to let down her guard and admit how hopeless and sad and burned out she really was.

Then one day, a guest on *The 700 Club* said, "Sheila, you ask us every day how we're all doing, but what about you? How are you doing?" And this question broke through Sheila's carefully guarded self-control. She could not control herself. She could not hold her composure. She broke down and began to cry uncontrollably, right there on air. By that evening, she had checked herself into a psychiatric hospital. She quit her job. She took a step back from her ministries. She admitted that she didn't know who she was anymore.

³ Gianpiero Petriglieri in "The key to loving your job in the age of burnout" by Cassie Werber, April 7, 2019. Quartz. <https://qz.com/work/1571065/how-to-love-your-job-and-avoid-burnout/>.

Today, Sheila Walsh is back in ministry, speaking and writing and sharing her struggles with depression. Instead of being rejected or put to shame for her condition, she discovered thousands of women who struggled with the same issue and needed to know they weren't alone. God did not miraculously heal her of her depression. Instead, God has used her depression to draw her into a deeper relationship with Him and increase her ministry to hurting people.

God is most glorified in the way we handle our suffering. Did you know that our blessings don't draw people to God as much as the way we handle our sufferings? No one is in awe of a healthy, smart, wealthy person who achieves great things. People are in awe of those, however, who overcome hard times, who choose joy in the face of sorrow, who choose love in the face of betrayal or hatred.

In other words, everything we experience in life, blessing and hardship, ability and disability, joy and sorrow, everything is an opportunity for God to work out His plan through us.

Does this mean that God causes everything that happens in our lives? No, I don't believe so. There is suffering that comes from the sins of others, like abuse, or crime, or neglect. And some come from impersonal forces outside of our control like natural disasters, illnesses, or recession. But what I am saying is that people need to see the character and power of God in how we handle our sufferings and hardships.

Another thing I want to share with you from this story is that you don't have to understand everything about God. What you need to do is just share what you know about Him. When the blind man was healed, people asked him about his healing. "What happened to you?" people asked. He said, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes; and told me to go wash it off. And I did." A few verses later, the Pharisees interrogate him about his healing. But he still didn't know who Jesus was or why Jesus healed him. He just thought Jesus was a prophet. But just because he didn't know who Jesus was, that did not stop him from sharing about what Jesus did for him.

The second time the Pharisees interrogated him, they accused Jesus of being a sinner. And this man said, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know is that I was blind but now I see!"

Sharing the story of what God has done in our lives is all we need to do to bring God honor and glory. There is a beautiful story on the *Divine Opportunities* blog by a man named Larry. Many years ago, Larry was driving

down Highway 240 in Memphis when he saw a car pulled off on the side of the highway. He felt strongly that God was leading him to stop and help. He pulled up behind the car and saw a young woman standing by the car. She had a flat tire. He asked if she needed help, as she nodded, she began to cry.

This woman was a mother of a two-year-old son who was being treated for leukemia at St. Jude Children's Hospital. To make her situation worse, her husband had walked out on the family soon after their child's diagnosis. And this flat tire crushed her heart. One thing after another. She couldn't take it anymore. She felt so lost and so alone.

Larry didn't have a solution for this woman other than changing her flat tire. But he did have a story. He knew now why he had felt the urge to stop. Eight and a half years earlier, when Larry's little son was just two years old, Larry's wife had died of leukemia. He knew what it was to be grief-stricken and confused. He knew what it was to be a single parent. He knew what it was to feel alone and helpless and desperate. He knew what it was to rely on God for his strength.

So, Larry began to share the story of how God worked through his grief and anger and loneliness. He shared how God had helped him to be a single parent to his little son. His sharing brought comfort and peace to this young mother.

Larry sat with the woman while she cried. Then he changed her tire and prayed with her. And when Larry drove away that day, he understood in a new way how God had used his pain to bring comfort and strength to someone else in need.⁴

As the professor said, "There's some pain that needs a solution, and some pain that needs a story." You may never receive an answer to your "Whys?" So, change the question to "How can God use this?" When we ask God for a reason, God often gives us a purpose. When we ask God for a solution, God may give us a story instead. But that story will be the story of how God is glorified in our weakness and how we persevere. "There's some pain that needs a solution, and some pain that needs a story."

⁴ <http://divineopportunity.com/stories-larry>.