

In the early church, one of the earliest sets of readings on the Lord's Day were called the scrutinies. These readings from John 4, John 9, and John 11 are also our assigned readings for last Sunday, this Sunday, and next Sunday. Last week we discussed Jesus and the woman at the well, and how Jesus ministers to someone who was a social outcast. Likewise, this week we are going to be talking about Jesus' healing of the man born blind. Next week we will talk about Jesus' raising of Lazarus.

The word scrutiny has a negative connotation. We consider it the same as to criticize or to condemn. But in the early church, these readings were used in conjunction with the searching and examination of new believers who were in the process of preparing for baptism. The new believers would search themselves, and the Church would search them in order to find secrets and sins that the Church could then forgive them and relieve them of. Much like last week's sermon on shame, they would discuss the shame so it could be healed.

And so too, our Gospel text starts with healing. **“And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.... Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.”**

And man does this start a series of problems. 3. The world scrutinized the blind man's sight restored. It would almost seem like he was better off blind because people couldn't accept that his sight was restored. There are four different rounds of questioning. First, His neighbors questioned him, and even thought it must be someone different. Second, his neighbors took him before the Jewish leaders, the pharisees, and the pharisees questioned the formerly blind man. They concluded that he must have not been born blind.

Third, then the pharisees called his parents to testify and all the parents could tell them is that their son was born blind. Fourth, the pharisees call the formerly blind man back in for questioning. When the man who was born blind testified to the great act of Jesus healing him, the pharisees cast him out of the synagogue saying, **“You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?”** I like one translation which translates the same verse, **“To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.”**

It would appear that the man who Jesus healed was worse than when he started. Yeah he has sight now, but at least people weren't bugging him. At least he was part of the synagogue and could be part of the Jewish worship community. He got into a lot of trouble just associating with Jesus. Now what does he have?

Often, we find that when we become Christians, or when we at least start to take our faith more seriously, we come under scrutiny. People might ask us, “Your God healed the blind man, why not heal this coronavirus?” “You’re spending your time watching a video of your pastor from your home? There’s probably something more interesting or entertaining that you could put on your screen.” People might call us hypocrites and point out inconsistencies in what we believe compared to how we act. Our association with Jesus gets us into all trouble.

I think few of us listening to this have been literally kicked out of a synagogue for our belief in Jesus. However, maybe we’ve found that we have to stop hanging out with a group of friends who was a bad influence on us. Maybe we stopped associating with certain clubs or organizations whose values don’t match ours. Maybe we had to give up certain practices and lifestyles. Now what do we have? Maybe scrutiny isn’t such a good thing.

In the early church the scrutinies were a time of cleansing and renewal for the new believers. The word scrutiny comes from the Latin word *scrutari* which means to search diligently, To scour, to search with a fine tooth comb.

In the ancient world, the *scrutari* were a group of people who would search piles of rubbish to find something valuable. We have words for these individuals today: scavengers, dumpster divers, and freegans. All of these are modern day *scrutari*. The point is to search for something valuable among the junk. An acquaintance of mine from college used to search dumpsters to find discarded food. He could find \$200 a week in perfectly fine food including things like cherry-smoked tenderloin, strawberries, and premium dark chocolate.

Why would I mention something so disgusting? I mention it because Jesus is one such scavenger. 2. Jesus searches, knows, and redeems you. Christianity isn’t about what we do for God. It isn’t about giving Jesus our heart, as if that was an asset and not a liability. A famous Lutheran theologian once wrote, “It is one thing to choose Jesus as one’s Lord and Savior, to give him one’s heart and commit oneself to him, and that he now accepts one into his little flock; it is a very different thing to believe on him as a Redeemer of sinners, of whom one is chief. One does not choose a Redeemer for oneself, you understand, nor give one’s heart to him. The heart is a rusty old can on a junk heap. A fine birthday gift, indeed! But a wonderful Lord passes by, and has mercy on the wretched tin can, sticks his walking cane through it, and rescues it from the junk pile and takes it home with him. That is how it is” (Bo Giertz, *Hammer of God*, 1973, page 147).

Jesus could have kept on walking past the man born blind. He probably had other things to get to. People to meet; places to go. Most people would have walked past a blind beggar without much thought, but Jesus looked past what others might consider piles of garbage to find someone who needed saving, who needed redeeming.

And so too he finds you. He is a divine scavenger. He is your scrutari who searches you, knows you, and redeems you. And it's not even that we were valuable or attractive that He found us and healed us. We weren't. Rather, in Christ loving us we become loveable. That's what it means to have a redeemer. He is an expert at making lemonade out of lemons. He is an expert at taking our shortcomings and reshaping them into something beautiful.

Jesus can do this because He himself became refuse. He was smitten, stricken, and afflicted, being whipped, tortured, and crucified for us. The cross is a picture of our garbage, sins, and imperfections being heaped on a perfect man. Yet Jesus was not tossed out and abandoned to death. He rose again, redeeming our sins, pains, and shortcomings.

It's one thing to dig around dumpsters in hopes of finding something great for free. It's another thing entirely dig around in dumpsters knowing it will cost you your life. That's what Jesus did for us. He did that for you. That's what it means to have a redeemer. A divine scrutari.

So we will gladly forsake all things to follow him knowing that it is worth it. It's worth it to give up our old way of life and our old circle of friends. It's worth it to quit that anti-Christian organization. I'm sure the man born blind would say the same thing. Christ is living water refreshing the soul. Jesus is the light of the world shining in a dark place and opening our eyes. Jesus is the resurrection and the life, raising us up on the last day. He is worth it.

Lastly, 1. Jesus searches, knows, and redeems the world. So as we look at the world around us and the distressing times we're in. We might wonder, can any good come from this? And right now it's hard to see as we sit at home watching church instead of being there in person. It's hard to see as we face economic hardships and are stressed out with new strains on our daily life.

In a world of COVID-19, we have faith that Jesus is the divine scavenger who can search through the piles of rubbish to find something valuable just as He found you. Just as He found me. We have faith that even though things look bleak, that our redeemer is redeeming even this situation right now. That he will make lemonade out of lemons.

Jesus says, **“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”** And indeed, wherever He is present in the hearts of believers. Wherever He is present in the Word proclaimed. Wherever He is present in Holy Communion distributed. There He is shining as the light of the world, opening the eyes of the blind, and breathing new life. There is He, our divine scrutari who searches amongst the ruins and makes something new. This is our hope as Christians. This is our prayer. This is our confidence. Amen!