

The beauty of this holy story is how believably human it is.

The first sentence identifies a problem.

The second sentence describes the conversation about who's to blame for it.

It doesn't always take so long to get there.

The man is blind from birth.

Adam and Eve are naked.

Coronavirus is sending the world into lockdown.

Who's to blame for this?

Was it this man or his parents?

Was it the man or the woman or the snake?

Was it a foreign country, the Democrats, the Republicans, or the cruise ship industry?

Things are not as we want or planned for, so who is to blame?

Maybe it's God.

I do not agree with anyone suggesting that the coronavirus is God's punishment for any so-called sin they most oppose.

But Jesus does make the troubling remark that this man *was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him*, meaning a lifetime of struggle, from blindness to begging to social isolation, just so that he could be an object lesson for God?

Like the cross, it doesn't seem fair in the least.

Which leads to the puzzle that vexes theological brains and, especially in times like these, that troubles religious hearts: the quandary named theodicy.

The problem is that three assumed truths cannot all be true at once: God is all good, God is all powerful, and evil happens.

Which of these three do you deny?

Otherwise it doesn't add up.

If God is all good and all powerful, why must people suffer this virus and its array of devastating effects?

Is God punishing us, or not powerful enough to help?

Do our prayers fall on deaf ears?

Who is to blame for this – us or God?

Jesus does not answer the question.

Jesus changes the conversation.

The eyes of the man born blind are opened, and maybe the eyes of the disciples will be too.

They are opened immediately, and they are also opened gradually.

The mud and saliva from less than six feet away do the physical trick instantly.

But the slop and spit of his interactions with others open his eyes more slowly.

Who it is that restored his physical sight comes slowly into view.

The light of the world starts out in his eyes as *the man called Jesus*.

Later he sees that he is a prophet ... from God ... the Son of Man ... Lord.
Lord, I believe.

And he worshiped him.
But it took him awhile to get there.

Surely we can understand.

This virus situation, in the words of popular theologian Ron Burgundy, *escalated quickly.*

I mean, that really got out of hand fast.

Now we are scrambling, like the crowds and the Pharisees and the parents, to wrap our lagging brains and habits and beliefs and expectations around a suddenly new and altogether different reality.

Our eyes have been opened suddenly, and now they are also opening gradually.

It will take us awhile to get there too.

In the meantime, the world around us reacts as systems always do, grasping to re-establish the equilibrium of the lost status quo.

The more change there is, good or bad, life-stealing or life-giving, the more frantically the system resists and the more tightly it grips what has not yet been lost, whether that is the freedom to take a walk or the rigid adherence to sabbath, the comfort of an orderly theology of sin and consequence or of a basket full of hand sanitizer.

Right now, we are all grieving, differently and simultaneously, so we are overwhelmed in a monstrous tangle of disbelief and denial and anger and bargaining and humor and kindness and fatigue and more.

Finger pointing and division are rampant.

Thousands are sick and dying; millions are scared and isolated.

The experts are unsure, the voices of authority are divided, and in a rich irony, it is an invisible threat that is gradually opening our eyes.

The gospel's question of us is, what will we now see?

We tend, of course, to see whatever it is we are looking for.

If we are looking for someone to blame, we will find them.

If we are looking for someone to help, we will find them.

If we are looking for reasons to worry, or to celebrate, or to complain, or to give thanks, we will find them.

Mister Rogers told young children, *When I was a boy, and I would see scary things in the news, my mother said to me, "Look for the helpers.*

You will always find people who are helping."

Open your eyes to nurses and doctors and truckers and scientists and generous donors and patient grocery workers.

Open your eyes also to the scared, pain filled souls they are serving.

Open your eyes to the vulnerable, those who have been pushed over the edge they were living on before they lost their income this week.

Open your eyes to both the fragility and the tenacity of the human spirit.

Open your eyes to our profound interconnectedness which we can see with new clarity after stepping back to social distance.

Open your eyes to the unfolding story of your life.

There are two figures who are present throughout: yourself and the rabbi who heals you.

Who are you, and who is he?

When your story ends, it will be you and him.

He will tell you who he has always been and you will worship him, and he will amaze you with whatever he says next.

He told the man born blind about his history of sight: *you have seen him.*

You have seen him.

The one who is now speaking to you is he.

The sight you have craved, the hope you have longed for, the security you have always wanted, the future you dreamed of, you have had it all since the beginning of the story.

Easter has been there since Ash Wednesday.

Resurrection has been there since birth.

Love has been there all along.

Joy is hidden in the struggle and carrying you through it.

Maybe you can already see it.

Someday you will be ready to see it all.