

A person may put a band aid on themselves, apply some Polysporin, or take their insulin. Some are adept enough to apply a splint after an accident on an expedition or create a tourniquet to stop their leg or arm from bleeding out in a pinch. And a doctor might even be able to see their symptoms in a mirror and know that this rash and that deficit means that they have kidney failure or a thyroid issue, though I'm pretty sure they aren't allowed to write up their own prescription.

For those that are born blind, it's pretty hard to help yourself out—for this, even the best doctors aren't much help, though I believe they've made some progress in this area since Jesus' day, God be praised.

This man in our text, nameless, simply called the-man-blind-from-birth, was helpless. Unable to provide for himself, he was resigned to the mercy of others, others who evidently had provided because the man is still here to that day. On that day though, he received a mercy like no other.

We don't have an account of this man crying out for help as other miracles are initiated with, but here instead a conversation occurs among the disciples. Whose fault is it that this man is suffering? His or his parents? If the disciples knew that he was blind from birth, I think they'd need to assume the latter for how could a sin he had not yet committed be the cause of his life-long agony and frustration, but they're asking the same questions we ask. Why? What did someone do for this poor guy to deserve such an unfortunate situation, such a debilitating condition?

"It was for such a moment as this," Jesus says, "that this man was born blind. Not as a consequence of his sin nor his mothers nor fathers, but that God's glory might be made known to the whole world through Him." And without any request or explanation He breaks the Rabbi's Sabbath laws, creates some mud with the dirt and His spit, kneading it into a sufficient paste, and applies it to the man-born-blind's eyes before sending him to wash in the pool called Sent, and by His actions and His Words, He heals the man-born-blind of his blindness.

Without his request, without his knowledge even really, he is freed from his debilitating blindness and given his life back to him—more than that, He's given him a life truer, better, freer than he's ever known.

“Awake O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Open your eyes and be renewed in life, all because of what Jesus the Christ has done for you.

Now this miracle is not well received by the high-ups, the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus’ time. They are displeased that someone dared to do work on the Sabbath. Jesus took the time to make some mud, mixing it and placing it on a man’s eyes to undo a lifetime of blindness. But as the text unfolds, they ought to be more and more displeased because not only is He opening eyes in order to see the beauty of a new day, He is casting blindness away from one more soul, as this helpless man unknowingly meets Jesus, declares Him to be at least a prophet to the Pharisees who want Jesus silenced, and by the end of the text He believes Jesus to be the Son of Man and is now a disciple, and not of Moses but of Christ.

“Awake O sleeper” indeed.

We would all love to be so awake, so aware of what Christ has done for us and to live in such a way that we follow God’s Law out of love for Him continually, that we live with faith in Him unceasingly. This is what Paul urges the Church of Ephesus to do. He says to walk in the light, to restrain themselves from living out the acts of darkness they were once so well acquainted with and now to discern, to find out what exactly is pleasing to the Lord. So build up with your words rather than tear down. Give joyfully rather than hoard out of fear. Live a chaste and holy life, taking control over your body and your lips rather than giving them free reign for whatever passions they choose. Forgive rather than hold resentments which only tear others apart.

Yet these dark activities continue even among those whom the light has shined upon. Christians, yes true Christians, still sin. This is no surprise, but it is our frustrating reality. How can we heed Paul’s commands? How can we follow in Christ’s footsteps and demonstrate His love for the world? How may we be light and live in the light when we cannot master and expel the darkness that persists among us and within us?

This has never been about perfecting our righteousness, about living a faultlessly “light” and “seeing” life. We’d love it to be because it would ease the

guilt we feel and it might make evangelism easier because others would see that with the Gospel you really can get your life completely together, but this has never been the point.

The point, from before the Light shone on us, and as the Light shines on us today, and everyday until we see that Light face to face in glory, is that He enlightens us and guides us. It is not that we should ever get to the point where we have no need for the Light, for Jesus. So we may despise the blindness that persists, the darkness that still encircles us, the sin that still makes its way out of our hearts, but we need not despair over it for it is simply another area that Jesus may show His grace and mercy, entering into our darkness to care for us.

Isaiah proclaimed that even though the people are blind in their sin, “Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the Lord?” (Isaiah 42:19). Not only did God’s servant, our saviour enter into the darkness of the world, but in fact He became blind along with us. Paul tells us that Jesus became our sin so that we would become the righteousness of God, and on the cross we see Jesus fulfilling this, suffering for our sin, enduring the darkness as even the sun refused to shine, all that we who confess that we are blind and wandering in darkness would have our eyes opened.

“Awake O Sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Paul’s answer to the frustrating sin that persists in spite of all that Christ has done in His Passion, out of His love, is to not take part of the works of darkness but instead to expose them. And this is not an invitation to go on a sin hunt, staring through the windows of our neighbours in order to expose the terrible things that they do. This is an invitation to catch ourselves in the midst of our sin and expose them to God. As we discern what is good and right, truly examining what we do in the day and the night and hold that up against God’s Word, His Law, where we fall short of holiness we are to own up to that and confess it to God. And His light shines on it and transforms it, as it is exposed it becomes visible, and as it is visible it is transformed into light. It is forgiven, we are made righteous, and Christ’s light gives us light.

This is the way to holy living, to sanctification, to obeying God's Law out of love for Him. Not perfectly, not here at least, but if we would like to be different than we were yesterday, the way to that is not trying to grapple against our sin and win over it by our own strength—that will only mask the outside of our actions at best, as our hearts would still be teeming with the sin we both despise and desire. Instead we ought to live each day in light of the 10 commandments and confess when and where we fall short, where we've allowed darkness to prevail, and trust that Christ gives us light all over again and that He will be our light still.

Awake o sleeper, not by your own will nor efforts, but as Christ shines on you, be enlightened and enlivened. So as you find you've gossiped and born false witness, don't vow never to do it again but confess it, plead for forgiveness and help; as you've grumbled against your parents, as you've misused the name of the Lord your God or neglected His Word and Sabbath, as you've lusted and coveted, don't make a 5-step plan to do better but honestly confess it to God. In your bedroom, in our offices, here together in the sanctuary, expose it to God and He is faithful to forgive and renew and strengthen, to make you and your life into His life and light.

Isaiah proclaims what God says: "And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them." (Isaiah 42:16) This He does in Christ who bore our blindness that we would have His sight, our death that we would have His life, and He has promised to guide us, not forsake us, as we carry on to life everlasting, to the day when Christ will be the only Light for all of His creation.

Awake, O Sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Amen.