Devotional Reflection, Thursday, September 3, 2026
Proper 17, the week of the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Not "Why?" but "What Next?"

Key phrases for reflection from today's Gospel reading
9:1As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, `Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 3Jesus answered, `Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' 6When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7saying to him, `Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

You will find the full text of today's Gospel reading at the end of this reflection.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings (*BCP*, 983)
AM Psalm 37:1-18; PM Psalm 37:19-42
Job 16:16-22,17:1,13-16; Acts 13:1-12; John 9:1-17

Today we celebrate the Feast of Phoebe. (See below.)

David's Reflections

In the summer of 1969, Hurricane Camille struck the Mississippi Gulf coast with 200 mile per hour winds in the eye wall, the strongest category 5 storm on record. More than three hundred people died. That fall, I was worshipping as a student in a student-led midweek prayer service at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The student speaker interpreted the storm as God's punishment on the Gulf coast for the gambling and prostitution and other evils he believed deserved such a divine response.

My question to him afterwards had to do with the innocent children and infants who perished in the storm. Did God have to take them out to get at

the evil people? What about those devoted to God who died? His approach ignored numerous biblical stories like this one, Jonah and the repentance of Nineveh, and Abraham praying for Lot (Genesis 18). God does not take out the innocent to get at the guilty; and, from this story, we must not assume a one-to-one relationship between sin and suffering. We naturally quest for explanations for random suffering and evil, explanations that elude our easy answers.

Jesus' followers wanted to explain the blind man's suffering in terms of a divine response of punishment for someone's sin, even the mother's or the baby's while in the womb. Jesus repudiated such lines of reasoning. To ask "why" something happens puts the discussion on the wrong level, the level of blaming; it involves retribution thinking. For Jesus, the question was not "why?" but "now what?" Our intellectual disputations about the problems of evil and suffering can distance us from those suffering and turn them into test cases. Better to dive into the suffering, as did Jesus in this reading. Better not to allow the quest for answers to the mystery of evil to distract us from addressing the travail of those suffering. This is not an either/or. Our intellectual quest can continue while we engage in the suffering of those we encounter.

Now what? Jesus did not look for a purpose in evil and suffering, like God allowing it to happen for some reason or intent. Rather, he looked to the result side. Suffering can be the occasion for the revealing of the love and saving purposes of God, for example in the healing of this blind man. Much energy gets dissipated trying to explain why evil and suffering happen. Often it feels like people are looking over God's shoulder, reading God's journal, when they are talking and dispensing information they've gathered from that privileged point of view.

A more discreet and modest attitude would take its clue from that of Jesus—refusing to get fixated on the "why" and ask the "what now" question. It is only natural perhaps to begin with the unanswerable "why" questions and supply our inadequate answers. Yet, we do well to move on to the "now what" question. How can God's loving purposes and saving intent be made known in the face of whatever evil and suffering we experience or encounter. Better to be involved in the healing of people like this blind man than to be sitting over coffee at Starbucks wondering aloud with others why it happened.

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Collect of the Day, Proper 17, the fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*. (BCP, 233)

Today we celebrate the Feast of Phoebe, deacon.
http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/phoebe.html
https://www.faithward.org/devotional-phoebe-deacon-and-benefactor/

Collect of the Feast of Phoebe
Eternal God, who raised up Phoebe as a deacon in your church and minister of your Gospel; Grant us that same grace that, assisted by her prayers and example, we too may take the Gospel to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Collect for Protection
O God, the life of all who live, the light of the faithful, the strength of those who labor, and the repose of the dead: We thank you for the blessings of the day that is past, and humbly ask for your protection through the coming night. Bring us in safety to the morning hours; through him who died and rose again for us, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (BCP, 124)

For the Parish
Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*. (BCP, 817)

A Collect for Mission
O God and Father of all, whom the whole heavens adore: Let the whole earth also worship you, all nations obey you, all tongues confess and bless you, and men and women everywhere love you and serve you in peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP, 124)

Daily Office Gospel, John 9:1-17

9:1As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, `Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 3Jesus answered, `Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' 6When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7saying to him, `Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, `Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' 9Some were saying, `It is he.' Others were saying, `No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, `I am the man.' 10But they kept asking him, `Then how were your eyes opened?' 11He answered, `The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' 12They said to him, `Where is he?' He said, `I do not know.'

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, `He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' 16Some of the Pharisees said, `This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, `How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. 17So they said again to the blind man, `What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, `He is a prophet.'

Daily Offices in the Book of Common Prayer

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *The Book of Common Prayer*
Noonday Prayer, page 103, *Book of Common Prayer*
Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p 109, *Book of Common Prayer*
Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*
Compline (Night Prayer), page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*
Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*