



Advent Reflection for Friday, December 17

Emily Flake

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

### John 9:1-7

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

As an enthusiastic home baker, I make a lot of pies. One common practice is known as “blind baking” – baking an unfilled pie crust, creating a nearly-done shell to be filled with, say, a custard and then baked again. It’s a pain in the neck, blind baking – an elaborate extra step that adds quite a bit of time, but impossible to make a decent custard pie otherwise. I’m able to draw a parallel here between this practice and the reading – taking an extra, painful step with an unfinished project, in order to produce a more perfect outcome. Jesus saw that the man had been left blind – unfinished, in a way, so that he might be able to use the man as a shining example of his power, bringing light not only to the blind man, but to the whole world.

This is, however, the most generous reading of the text I can muster. “Why does God allow bad things to happen” is an eternal question, and it seems like this text is answering it as “to prove that He can do good.” This is monstrous on the face of it. To consign a man to a life of blindness for the sake of a proof-of-concept demonstration? This text makes me angry at God, or at least at God as we understand Him. I am aware that I personally have so much more to be grateful to God than angry at Him for, maybe we all do. But I don’t love this passage as a possible explanation to the question of why God, in His compassion and mercy, allows suffering.

The best way I can wrap my head around that question is this: Suffering exists, and we all have a responsibility to combat it, as a collective effort of humanity. And how can we fight what we can’t – or won’t – see? Perhaps to God there is even a kind of beauty in suffering, a kind of bass note or foundational stone that keeps us from existential fatuousness. And maybe that is the blindness we’re being asked to leave behind here – an invitation to open our eyes to all of God’s creation, whether or not we like what we see.

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