

The blame game. Everyone has probably played this one. Some are better at it than others.

There are several versions.

One goes like this: a person has done something that hurts another person. This makes the perpetrator uncomfortable- or worried that they'll be punished for their wrongdoing-- so they blame their actions on someone else, or they turn it back on the person they've hurt—saying they wouldn't have done it if they hadn't been driven to it.

Some groups blame other groups for all the problems of community, but refuse to acknowledge how they've contributed to the problems.

Some people just don't want to get caught. This is probably the one we are most familiar with. It starts as children, "I didn't do it! HE did it!"

Later, we get more adept that the blame game and develop ever more creative ways of assigning blame to anyone but ourselves. But the truth is someone ELSE must be to blame, because no one wants to be guilty.

The most serious type of blaming is when a whole country scapegoats someone or some group for something serious: blaming indigenous people for their predicament, caused by living on reservations, blaming voting machines for a loss in an election, blaming immigrants for all the violent crime in our country, blaming working women for the destruction of our families, blaming Asian Americans for Covid.

Scapegoats.

We have been scapegoating ethnic groups and individuals since—well, from long before the time of Jesus.

In Jesus' timeframe, society had decided that if a person was born blind—it was because the blind person was a sinner from birth, either from his own sin, or that of his parents.

In our day, we can't fathom someone telling the family of a child who was born blind that their child must be a sinner—or the parents are—to have caused the blindness.

Jesus obviously couldn't fathom it either, because when someone asked him which person sinned, the blind person or his parents, "*Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."* I'm sure blind people everywhere are grateful that Jesus acknowledges that God's works are revealed even in blind people.

But for those people surrounding Jesus who are invested in what they've been taught from birth—if you are born with an infirmity—you are a sinner---then they need to find someone to blame when the blind sinner is no longer conveniently blind. How are they ever going to feel better about themselves if they can't compare themselves—the blameless ones—with someone who is clearly a sinner.

They are—after all-- not really bad, these bystanders, these Pharisees, but it's hard to unlearn what we've learned from people we respect.

First they accuse the man of not *really* being born blind—he must have somehow scammed them all- and they can't have that.

They find the parents of the blind man. "Is this your son who YOU say was born blind?"

Already the parents are wishing they could be anywhere else. “Yes,” Please don’t blame us, they think- they are already on the defensive.

“Who did this to him, made him see?”

“I don’t know,” they anxiously respond. “Ask him, he is of age.” Notice the blame game is now being played by all the parties. The pharisees are trying to assign blame, the parents are trying to *deflect* blame.

The Pharisees interrogate the formerly blind man again: “You better say God did this, because this other guy—he is a SINNER!”

*“He answered, ‘I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’ They said to him, ‘What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?’ He answered them, ‘I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?’”*

You really have to love this guy.

When they can no longer blame the blind man for his predicament--they land on Jesus. “Let’s blame HIM! He’s doing healing on the Sabbath! Ignore the fact that he healed someone—he did it on the forbidden day!!!!”

So they turn again to the blind man, and they “*reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple, but... we don’t even know where he comes from.’*” They say that like being from somewhere else is a bad thing.

And our blind hero says: “*If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out.*”

The blame game. The people who play it best, know that they are most comfortable in life if they don’t learn anything new because that might cause them to have to see the world in a different way—make them change their minds about what they “know”.

I mean, what if indigenous people are not responsible for the plight of the reservations, immigrants are not criminals- but hard-working folk, Asian Americans had absolutely nothing to do with developing or spreading Covid, and moms everywhere are just trying to hold the family together in whatever way they can? If we can’t scapegoat other people, what’s a person to do?

We’ll let Jesus have the last word here:

*“If you Pharisees were actually blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your blindness is of your own making, and your sin remains.”*

You see, the blame game has no winner, just victims, and none are so blind as those who refuse to see. Amen.