

‘Once I was blind, but now I see.’

Fourth Sunday in Lent Year A

John 9:1 – 41

(1 Samuel 16:1 – 13, Psalm 23, Ephesians 5: 8 – 14)

St Peter’s 8 am and 10 am 19th March 2023

Many years ago, I remember listening to my Bible Class leader as he shared a story. It wasn’t a Bible story but the impact was still powerful. Over the years I have heard other versions of the same story.

“A young newly married couple moved to a new home and while having their breakfast that first morning watched their neighbour putting her washing out on the line. The young bride noticed that it didn’t look very clean and commented to her husband that perhaps the wrong washing powder was being used. This happened a few times and then a week or so later the young bride was surprised to see how clean her neighbour’s washing was. Again, she commented, wondering out loud what had made the difference. Her husband smiled and softly said, ‘I got up earlier than you today and washed our windows.’

In many ways I think today’s story from John 9 wants us to learn the same lesson that young bride learned. Our perspective can greatly influence our viewpoint and more sadly still what we see and believe as TRUTH. This story in John 9 is about a blind man. But it’s so much more. It is about Jesus as the son of God, of Jesus as MESSIAH and a story which clearly shows us his identity as both those.

Throughout John’s gospel we see Jesus showing by both his actions and his words that he is the Messiah, the son of God. The people of the day, those sick in mind and body, those who knew the darkness in their own souls had no problem believing Jesus but the Pharisees, the religious leaders, those versed in the Old Testament teaching and laws all had more difficulty. Their minds, accustomed way of life, almost obsessive keeping of even more laws than God gave on Mt Sinai, were a barrier in their thinking towards the new kingdom way of life Jesus was ushering in.

Jesus had begun proving he was God by miracles such as turning water into wine, by transforming lives such as the woman at the well who told her whole town to come and meet Jesus, and he had spoken with such unusual authority that the Temple Guards sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest him returned without him as they said 'no one ever spoke the way this man does.'

In Luke 4, echoing Isaiah 61 Jesus declared that part of his mission as the son of God was to bring recovery of sight to the blind. Each of the gospels has stories of Jesus healing the blind, in fact more accounts of healing blindness than any other healing. In our previous chapter Jesus declared 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'

Let's look at John 9. A long 41 verse account of this blind man and we don't even know his name. Perhaps that is so we can see ourselves as the blind man. As we look let's stay aware of Jesus attitudes and actions, eg always compassionate towards those who are aware of their need for help, those of the bystanders and lets also note the journey of this man from darkness to light, from blindness to sight.

What would it be like to be totally blind? In those days it meant to sit on the side of the road begging for money or perhaps food just to survive. Hoping for friends to help us when we needed to walk anywhere. Hoping that the food wasn't rotten or that the 'coins' weren't other pieces of junk metal. With no prospect of change from the daily routine. Next to no chance of a fulfilling and truly meaningful life. He wasn't too young so had lived this way for many years. We know this as when his parents were questioned later in the account, they, from fear of being ostracized and excluded from the community, refused to answer except to affirm he was their son and was born blind. Their reply was 'he is of age; he will speak for himself.'

We meet him as the disciples ask Jesus ‘Who sinned? This man or his parents?’ They were looking for a reason for his misfortune but Jesus refocused them on a higher, more godly purpose. We hear similar things today too.

We’ve probably all been asked questions such as ‘If there is a God, why does he allow bad things to happen to good people?’ These are legitimate questions but not usually the real issue. Jesus states that neither the man nor his parents sinned to cause his blindness but to show the higher purpose of God to bring light in our darkness.

Jesus could have just spoken a word of healing as he had done previously but this time he didn’t. He didn’t even speak to the blind man immediately. I wonder what that blind man thought and felt as he heard Jesus spit into the dust and then felt Jesus rubbing the mud formed from the dust and saliva into his eyes. I wonder whether he expected his eyes to be healed as Jesus sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam which means SENT or whether he just wanted the mud out of his eyes. We do know that his life changed forever from that time of washing. He went away blind and came back seeing. That needs to be the testimony of each of us when Jesus touches our lives as we have all been spiritually blind before he brings his light.

Last year I had the privilege of sitting with a friend while she had her cataract operation. I got to see it all on the screen just to the left of the surgeon. Wow! Science these days is just amazing, and her face a day or so later when she could see more than previously was great, equalled by the delight when she got her new glasses last week and could read things again. This man had **never** seen the sun, a flower, a lizard, even his parents, his friends etc though he may have had heightened senses of smell, hearing and touch.

This was his physical moment of transformation and the beginning of his journey from darkness towards God’s light. He still looked the same to his neighbours but

was obviously able to see them. We don't read that they rejoiced with and for him. He knew it was Jesus who had healed him but couldn't answer their questions as to who exactly Jesus was or where he was as he had never seen him. So, the neighbours brought him to the Pharisees who were certainly not delighted at what had happened. They were more concerned that Sabbath rules had been broken. I am sure Jesus knew what their reaction would be and I wonder if he was almost teasing them by making mud for the blind man's eyes (like the work of making a tiny brick) or by sending the man to the pool which was possibly too far on the sabbath according to the Pharisees rules even for a miracle.

I wonder too whether at times we miss the delight of someone's genuine touch from God in some area of healing or other area of blessing because we are too busy asking WHY, perhaps even WHY THEM or HOW.

As the questions and comments went back and forth between the religious leaders and the man his replies stayed short and to the point. He originally knew it was Jesus and had thought he might be a prophet and had testified to that. Now as the pressure on him builds he declares 'I don't know if he is a sinner or not but once I was blind and now I see.' He even dared to ask if they wanted to be his disciples too when they asked the same question as to what happened. This infuriated them more but even under the persecuting barrage of insults the man replies with godly wisdom and further insight. His sight is growing way beyond his physical healing. Let's read v 30 – 33 again from The Passion Translation.

³⁰ The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. ³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

The Pharisees now totally incensed excommunicate him and Jesus hearing this finds him and has the last word. That word with our previously blind man leads him

to belief in Jesus as the Son of God and to worship. Physical and spiritual blindness are both healed and sight and spiritual insight given by God's loving grace.

The Pharisees who claimed they could see did not have spiritual insight. They knew more than most the scriptures regarding Christ coming as the Messiah to heal, to deliver from darkness to light and yet chose not to believe the evidence shown them and spoken to them by Jesus. They were spiritually blind.

And what is the challenge for each of us today? Ephesian 5:8 – 10 reminds us to 'live as children of light' and to 'find out what pleases the Lord.'

Do we notice, with awe and wonder, the transforming work of God in our midst - in our world, our lives, the lives of our friends? Do we have blind spots where we need Jesus to help us '**really see**' others and the world as he sees? As we allow God to touch those areas where we need to move into His light in a deeper way in both our attitudes and beliefs, may we affirm and testify often as did the blind man

- '**once I was blind, but now I can see.**'

BACKGROUND MATERIAL READ OR LISTENED TO ON AUDIO TO PREPARE

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| Twelve Months of Sundays Years A, B, C | by Tom Wright |
| Everyman's Bible Commentary - John | by Robert W. Yarbrough |
| John – The Gospel of Belief | by Merrill C Tenney |
| Jesus is the Giver of Sight (You Tube) | Thomas Slager, Highlands Church |
| Jesus gives a blind man his sight (You Tube) | Bruntsfield Evangelical Church |
| Seeing and Seen (You Tube) | Kristin Adkins-Whitesides |
| Jesus Heals a Man Blind From Birth (Article) | Catholic Daily Reflections |
| I Once was Blind, but Now I See (Article) | Sam Storms, Oklahoma City |
| Commentary on John 9:1 – 41 (Article) | Melinda Quivik – Working Preacher |

March 22, 2020