

Lent 4 Jesus restores sight to the man born blind. John 9:1-41 3rd April 2011 DT

Theme: **“Looking at who Jesus really is!”**

Introduction

This wonderful passage from John 9 follows last week’s equally intriguing Lectionary reading of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. In today’s passage there are a host of possibilities to speak about – many are questions.

- These include:
- sin and did/does it cause disabilities?
 - healing, both physical and spiritual – a reality!?
 - who is Jesus?
 - why did Jesus heal this person and not others?
 - why do some people have faith and others don’t?
 - why did the authorities not accept this man’s testimony?
 - can God through Christ still speak to us today?
 - spiritual blindness – is it still around?
 - the spiritual journeying of this healed man linked to our spiritual journeying

While I raise all these questions and possibilities I don’t plan to answer them but rather to share some aspects about the passage that may further encourage our reflection upon Scripture.

Background

Here in John 9, Jesus performs a sign (‘semeion’ in the fourth Gospel rather than a miracle), which is followed by dialogue and then commentary from Jesus that provides the theological framework through which to interpret the meaning of the sign. The actual healing itself is narrated very succinctly, because it is not the miracle that is the critical point. Rather, as a sign, it points beyond itself to what an encounter with Jesus signifies. The narrative weight is given to the dialogue and the discourse that follows rather than to the healing itself. We need to keep this in mind as we reflect upon this passage else we tend to lose what is the main objective of the discussion. In a sense the Lectionary should take us on to John 10 immediately because it is here that we have Jesus declaring that he is the ‘good shepherd’ in one of the “I am ...” sayings of John’s Gospel signifying an aspect of “who Jesus is”.

However, it is not until after Easter that we return to the John 10 passage which is a shame because of the linkages inherent in John 9 and 10. Much like the Samaritan woman at the well, the blind man grows in his understanding of who Jesus is, yet this time not with direct dialogue with Jesus but through witness to his encounter with Jesus. In his interrogation by the by the Pharisees, the blind man repeatedly tells his

story and comes to know that Jesus is from God (vs 33). This confession is the main reason for his expulsion from the synagogue. Note that Jesus has been absent from the narrative since the healing and only returns in verse 35 when he finds the man who has been cast out of the synagogue.

Interpreting John 9:1–10:21 as a unit yields a number of exegetical insights for the interpretation of the healing of the man born blind from birth.

1. While a first interpretation of this story may focus on the importance of seeing or ‘spiritual sight’, in recognizing who Jesus is, the importance of hearing is revealed in the discourse of the story. In fact, the blind man first responds to Jesus’ voice. Jesus tells him “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam”(vs 7), which the blind man does. He hears Jesus before he sees Jesus.
2. Like the woman at the well, the blind man recognizes Jesus gradually. He goes from seeing ‘the man called Jesus’ (vs 11) to calling Jesus a prophet (vs 17) to recognizing that Jesus must be from God (vs33) to addressing him as ‘Lord’ and worshipping him in vs 38. Jesus himself reveals the importance of both sight and hearing when it comes to belief. Jesus says in vs 37 “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”
3. The importance of hearing and seeing comes into full relief when Jesus’ words in John 10:1-21 are heard along with the healing of the blind man. In the discourse Jesus integrates seeing and hearing with believing. Jesus re-iterates that those who know him, his sheep, hear his voice and follow him. here the relationship is found in the ‘knowing’ the voice and following the shepherd.
4. The blind man is more than one who Jesus heals: he is one of Jesus’ sheep, a member of the fold, a disciple. Like the sheep, the blind man hears Jesus’ voice. Like the shepherd, Jesus finds the blind man when he has been cast out (vs 35). Jesus provides much more than sight for the man born blind. He provides for him what Jesus as the Good Shepherd gives all his sheep: the protection of his fold, the blessing of needed pasture and the gift of abundant life.

Hence, hearing and seeing are much more than ways by which one recognizes or believes in Jesus. They are, in fact, expressions of relationship with Jesus which also means a relationship with God the Father.

Conclusion

As we pilgrimage in this Lenten period of the Christian year reflect upon your encounter with the Christ.

How and when did you hear the voice of Jesus? Who were those that brought that voice to you? How do you bring the voice of Christ to others in your journeying?

In whom do you see Christ at work in a tangible way? What is it about those individuals that ‘touches you’ in a Christ-like manner?

May we have the faith of the man born blind and act as he did!

“Then the man said, ‘Lord I believe,’ and he worshipped him.” (vs 38) Amen!!