

Lent 4 – Wesley Uniting (9 & 10.30am) – 30th March 2014

Theme: “Spiritual Blindness”

Reading: John 9:1-41

Text: “For judgement I have come into the world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, ‘What? Are we blind too?’ vss 39-40

Introduction

I can barely imagine what it must be like to be blind and to live in a world of shades, shapes or darkness. The closest I can get to being blind is to take my glasses off and to see blurred shapes instead of clear images. Indeed I am fortunate that we have the technology that enables me to have good vision with my glasses. My glasses have something like 7 lenses in them which means that I have clear vision both close up and at a distance. On the other hand my Father was blind for the last ten or twelve years of his life. For a while he had some peripheral vision but this faded with glaucoma and macular degeneration taking away his sight. So much so, that combined with the Parkinson’s Disease, he needed to be fed as he couldn’t see his plate and the tremors meant he couldn’t find his mouth. When well enough I would, on occasions, take him out to his favourite restaurant where I would feed him his favourite meal of flathead followed by apple pie and ice-cream.

It was one of the few pleasures that Dad seemed to have later in life – the enjoyment of good food. Hence as I re-read the Gospel for today, I had this flood of personal memories reminding me of the loss of independence that blindness brings. For many in our society who are blind, the gift of seeing eye dogs and the various braille devices, sensing canes and so forth still give some independence. However this was not the case in Jesus’ day. Those who were blind were left as outcasts of society, beggars who depended totally on others and often had no one to care for them.

For us in our society, this is almost unimaginable but in Jesus’ time it was relatively common.

John 9: 1-41

During this Lenten time I have been part of a Bible study called “With You Always” by the Rev Rob Bos that has challenged us to look at our Christian habits and practices and see where we can spend more appropriate time in our faith activities. In particular we have looked at friendship and betrayal, using some of the disciples as examples. We have examined aspects of Judas and Peter’s relationship with Jesus and reflected on those relationships for ourselves with both our friends and the way we walk with and treat or mis-treat our relationship with Jesus. This has been both enlightening but also challenging for me in my Lenten journeying as I realise that I can be hot and cold in my faith, I can be incredibly affirming of others or I can also be quite scathing and put others down. As I came to look at the passage for today, there are a number of things that simply ‘jumped out at me’ from the passage.

First and foremost was that the miracle or the ‘sign’ of the healing of the blind man and while exceedingly important to that individual, John uses this ‘sign’ as a teaching example for Jesus.

Initially, there is the question by the disciples about the man born blind – who sinned? Why is this man like he is? Usually it was thought back in Jesus’ day that if you had an affliction from birth, your mother or father were to blame for the condition. How

horrendous is that for our way of thinking today! Yet there are still people who think like this today, which appals me. Jesus uses this instance to teach that this may be an opportunity to see 'that the work of God might be displayed....' And so follows the healing in the traditional way – two verses have the healing miracle out of the 41 verses of the chapter. Hence the actual healing, while important, is secondary to a number of other aspects within the passage. Jesus mixes spit with dirt and makes a mud pack for the eyes. He then tells the man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam, which was part of the water system for Jerusalem, built by King Hezekiah, a faithful king of Israel. The man is healed of his blindness.

Secondly, this leads to people asking questions about both the healed blind man and 'How then were your eyes opened?' (vs 10)

This transformation, this sign, leads to the Pharisees investigating not only the former blind man's story but also seeking out who this Jesus is.

Thirdly, we read that Jesus performed this healing on the Sabbath(vs 14) which caused much debate both because it was the holy day (a day of no work by the Law) and was Jesus a sinner because he did this on the Sabbath, yet the healing appeared to be of God!

Fourthly, the man's parents were brought in and questioned by the Pharisees to make sure that he was born blind and this wasn't a hoax.

Fifthly, is the growing testimony of the man born blind who has been healed. We read:

"..The man called Jesus put mud on my eyes.." (vs 11)

Later he says: "He is a prophet." (vs 17b)

Then in vss 30-33 we read these extraordinary words he says to the Pharisees: "You don't know where Jesus comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God doesn't listen to sinners. He listens to the Godly person who does his will.If this man was not from God he could do nothing."

Finally, Jesus finds the healed man after he was thrown out of the synagogue and has a faith conversation with him.

"Do you believe in the Son of Man? (vs 35b)

This is a term Jesus uses of himself 81 times in the Gospels and is only used of and for himself. In Daniel 7:13-14 the Son of Man is pictured as a heavenly figure who in the end times is entrusted by God with authority, glory and sovereign power. That Jesus uses the "Son of Man" as a Messianic title is here evident and he calls the healed blind man to belief. "Lord, I believe," and he worshipped him" (vs 38)

Here we have the steps of faith only paralleled by the 'Samaritan woman at the well' in John 4. However with her others believed. Here the Pharisees are still blind.

The Sixth point is the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees who in spite of the evidence before their eyes still fail to believe in Jesus and the healed man before them.

The growing faith of one person is contrasted to the continuing spiritual blindness of the Pharisees. Not only were the physical eyes opened but also the spiritual eyes of the man born blind.

Where do we fit into this account?

As we journey through Lent there is the self-faith examination that comes with the season. Does our spiritual blindness hamper us from living Christ filled lives? Do we stick too much with the Pharisees and so not let the light of Christ unshackle our blindness to God at work in the lives of those around us and so share the joy, the hope and the love that God wants for us?

Or are we still working through some of those faith steps that the man born blind experienced as he came to affirm Jesus as the Son of Man.

This passage is full of irony. The blind man sees and those who think they see and know so much are portrayed as badly blinded and lacking true knowledge. It may lead to us asking;

“Where are the spiritual blind spots that we have? Where do we need healing and wholeness so that we may see?”

May we struggle, reflect and grow through God’s word for us today as we travel with Jesus on the road to Jerusalem and our own faith journeying.

Let us pray:

Be our vision, Lord of our minds! Enable us to see things as you see them. To discern in the ebb and flow of life the Providence that knows our every need before we ask. To look upon both neighbours and enemies with compassion. To recognise in the beggar, stranger, hungry and homeless the face of the Child of God. To look in the mirror and see a much-loved disciple called by Christ to an abundant life. Please, healing Christ, anoint our eyes with your salve, that we may see better than ever before and follow your way with anticipation and joy. In your name and to your praise, we pray. Amen.