

## Sermon 19 March 2023 Jesus heals a blind man

### Ephesians 5:8-14 John 9:1-16,35-44

Jesus heals a blind man and the disciples immediately put the question to him, 'Was it this man or his parents who sinned and so caused him to be blind?' This reflects a Jewish belief of the time that any suffering was a result of sin somewhere along the line. However, Jesus contradicts this, and he answers, *'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's work might be revealed in him.'*

This is interesting because it highlights an aspect of John's Gospel. Each Gospel is written with a different agenda in mind but only in John's Gospel is this agenda made explicit. *'But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him, you will have life.'* John 20:31. John's intent in writing about everything that Jesus did was to reveal God's glory which in turn leads us to faith in God.

So there are two miracles taking place here. Firstly, the miracle of blindness being turned into sight. What an incredible experience it must have been for that man. It is difficult for us to comprehend. Sight is something we just take for granted, and like anything, it is only when you don't have it, do you really appreciate it.

At the age of 37 Jack Abbott wrote a book called 'In the Belly of the Beast.' Since the age of 12, Jack had spent all but one year of his life in reform schools and prison. About 15 of these years had been spent in solitary confinement. One of his worst solitary experiences was the so-called 'blackout' cell. Not a crack of light entered the cell. The darkness was so absolute that it was like being in ink. His eyes hungered for light, for colour.

Compare Jack's experience with that of another man named Evans. After being blind for 51 years, Evans received sight through an operation. Having had his sight restored, Evans said he couldn't wait to get up every morning just to see what he could see. Everything was on a constant high.

So what an amazing experience that must have been for the blind man Jesus healed. But there was another miracle taking place, and that was a miracle of faith. This is really the miracle that John stresses in the telling of this story. This lies at the heart of the purpose of John's Gospel – to lead us to a position of faith through extolling God's glory. Let me recap as I quote from the Gospel reading, *'Jesus said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him.'*

This story highlights a truth for us – Jesus reveals the reality, the nature of God. Jesus sheds light on the existence and the essence of God. As he says in verse 5, *'I am the light of the world.'* And I refer you to the words of our last song in our service, Shine Jesus Shine – *'Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us, set us free by the truth you now bring us.'* And then there are those wonderful words written by John Newton in his song, Amazing Grace, *'I was blind but now I see.'* Just like the blind man in our Gospel story, that was a statement about a transformation of faith.

This revelation of God through the person of Jesus is one of the outcomes of the Easter story, but we will look at that in three weeks time.

I want to focus for a moment on our first reading from Ephesians, and I quote, *'For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.'* It is our role to shine light into the dark corners of life; to bring hope, relief and comfort to those experiencing darkness in their lives. In so doing, we are acting as agents of Christ himself. In so doing, we can be considered followers of Christ. In so doing, we are going some way towards being faithful servants of God. In so doing, we can actually bring meaning into our own lives.

Let me remind you of the story of the wise man who was once asked what the meaning of life is. He took out of his hip pocket a small round mirror. He said, *'As a small child I found this and I began to play with this as a toy, and became fascinated with the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun never shines, in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to give light into the most inaccessible places I could find. As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just a child's game but a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I came to understand that with what I have and who I am I can reflect light into the dark places of this world – into black places in the hearts of men and women, and change some things in some people, bring warmth where there is cold, comfort where there is sorrow, serenity where there is unease. This is the meaning of life.'*

It doesn't matter what gifts or talents we might have, every single one of us has the ability to be kind, to be generous, to give something of ourselves in order to help others. If we really are to proclaim a faith, we need to back up our words with deeds....good ones!

James, as always, puts it very directly, *'Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all – it is dead and useless.'* James 2:17.

A final observation. Jesus comes to each of us as he came to people in biblical times. He comes as a remarkable man. He speaks the same three words to us that he spoke to people in biblical times: *'Come, follow me.'*