

St Hilda's Sermon - Sunday 26th March 2017 - Graeme Bellamy

Lord, may the words I speak be those You want spoken, may the words we hear be those You want us to hear and may we live to Your glory. Amen

I must confess at this point that web search has been a real saviour for me. It is many years since I have talked to you all from here and I found it a challenge to put this together.

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

Today the Gospel is from St John, who is sometimes referred to as the Apostle of love. John played a major role in the early church and was a member of the Lords most intimate inner circle. In his writings he lays particular stress on the Christians love of Christ. From the gospel accounts we observe that John was capable of behaving in a narrow-minded, reckless, and impetuous ways. Under the control of the Holy Spirit, all his liabilities were exchanged for assets.

A comment from Philip Yancy is "Clearly, Jesus did not come to solve "the problem of pain" while on earth. Yancy points out some interesting facts about the miracles that Jesus performed -

1. Our own science-dominated century has found little place for miracles. Until now. People who could never swallow the miracles in the Bible now show an intense interest in the potential for miracles to help *them*.
2. The Gospels record about three dozen miracles, some of them group healings. (Many other miracles performed by Jesus, John tells us, are not recorded.)
3. Jesus resisted miracles "on demand" to prove himself, even when he had splendid opportunities to do so: before Herod, with Satan in the wilderness, in response to the religious authorities.
4. Most miracles of healing came as a result of Jesus' compassion—the sight of a suffering person moved him deeply.
5. "Spiritual" miracles tended to excite Jesus more than physical ones.

6. Though they did not solve all problems on earth, Jesus' miracles were a sign of how the world should be, and someday will be.
7. Jesus also did miracles to establish his credentials—so that when he declared who he was, he would have some evidence to back up the claim.

Chapter 9 is a summary of John's concept of revelation and sin. Jesus's coming reveals who people are and that we are all really in darkness. We need the giver of sight and light, and the ones who own up to this need and accept Jesus as the Revealer and the giver of light and sight, will truly be able to see. The ones who insist they see already, in fact do not see and are kept away from God through sin.

Christ cured many who were blind by disease or accident; here he cured one born blind. The healing of the blind man is presented as a parable of spiritual illumination. Thanks to the coming of the true light of the world, many of the people formally in darkness have been enlightened.

Verses 1 through 12 detail this man's miraculous healing.

Jesus is travelling with his disciples and they come upon a blind man who has been blind since birth. Jesus' disciples ask if the blindness is a punishment from God for the sin of this man or his parents. Jesus explains that the man's blindness has a higher purpose; to show the glory of God in his life. At this, Jesus declares himself the light of the world and heals the man using mud and saliva. The now-sighted man, so astonished at his healing, begins to tell those who recognize him about the man that is Jesus. However, as in previous chapters of John, Jesus is nowhere to be found after the miracle, which again shows that His works may be less for the sake of his immediate image, and more guided toward understanding at a later point. Despite the fact that the man was healed, the Jews harass him in disbelief. Even though Jesus had attributed the man's blindness to God's glory, rather than to sin, the Pharisees continue to label this man a sinner.

This miraculous healing is part of the Glorification of Jesus being his upcoming death, resurrection, and accession is one of the major themes in the gospel of John. In verse 4 Jesus states "we must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work." When Jesus inhabits the world He is the light and when He leaves it will be dark with sin. Then in verse 5 we have even more

evidence of this when Jesus says "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

The healing of a blind man is a continuation of the theme that God is a loving God toward mankind. Jesus tells them the man is not blind as a punishment but as an example of God's glory and love.

Jesus then proceeds to make some mud and give the man sight. John says Jesus spat on the ground, made a paste, and put it on the man's eyes. The word in the text is the verb, to christen. Literally, Jesus "christened" his eyes: He anointed the man by the power of his name. Then he told him to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam. Just like that, he could see. It was a miracle. John has probably included this part due to the fact that he was writing for a Jewish audience, and the inclusion of the mud could have been seen as a violation of the Sabbath 3 times over: Jesus kneaded the mud, which was forbidden; then made from it a potential building material, which was forbidden; then healed the man's sight, which was also forbidden.

Verses 13 – 34 look at the Pharisees who were so intent on proving the man wrong that they summoned his parents to the scene and interrogated them as well. Though the parents claim the man as their son, they are hesitant to get involved further out of fear of being removed from the temple. The family is clearly poor, as their son must beg outside of the temple to be able to get by. If the man and his family were to be thrown out of the temple, he would be unable to beg outside of it; indeed, people would probably shun him because of it. The family tries very hard to stay out of it, saying that their son is of age and can speak for himself. This plan did not necessarily work, however, as the son was thrown out of the temple anyway.

The entirety of chapter 9 demonstrates how the man who was once blind can now see in both a physical and a spiritual sense. The Pharisees, then, are examples of those who are spiritually blind, who are grasping at whatever argument may suit their opposition to the light.

Jesus talks about the principle of spiritual blindness. It seems to mean that if we are a true believer we do not claim to have all of the answers or to understand fully. We follow in spite of not knowing. Claiming to know all, is like having a blind man claiming to understand colours. One

cannot fully express what they cannot see. He tells the Pharisees that since they claim to be able to see, they are, in fact, still with sin and do not see at all.

The chapter concludes with the man that was healed being thrown out and Jesus returning to him. Jesus asks if he believes in the Son of Man, and the man says no, but asks who he is so that he may believe. Jesus then reveals himself to the man and says that on Judgment Day the blind, in this case the spiritually blind, will not be saved, but those who can see will. As in those who accept Jesus will be saved in the end.

The issue is not the cause of the man's blindness, but the role that it plays in the work of God. The role is the power of the Spirit and of the Word, making Christ known as the One sent by the Father, gives him sight. It is the divine teaching in the heart of man. Christ, as man, touches us. We are absolutely blind, we see nothing. The Spirit of God acts, Christ being there before our eyes; and if we truly welcome Him then we see clearly.

God doesn't expect us to know all the answers. He is the answer. When we trust him to lead and guide us, God will give us all we need to live a full and abundant life.

We ask the same question today. It goes like this: Why do bad things happen to innocent people? Why are thousands killed in wars and conflicts between nations and people? Why are some babies born with birth defects? Why does cancer strike some and not others?

It's an age-old question, and there's no easy answer to it. Jesus told his disciples, "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but, that the works of God might be revealed in him." That's not to say God caused it. It is to say God can use the tragic circumstances of our lives to strengthen us and bless others, if we're willing.

Dick Donovan says, "... the difficult times in our lives sometimes provide us with special opportunities to bless other people. ... When we bear our difficulties with faith, the people around us find themselves blessed by our faith — blessed by our courage — blessed by our grace under pressure. Our terrible times can be fertile ground from which blessings spring."

God will use our trials and tribulations to bless us and use us as a witness of faith to others.

Let's wrap it up. Four groups, all blind:

- The disciples, stuck on the mundane level, unable to see the big picture.
- The friends, stuck in the past, unable to recognize the transforming power of God's love.
- The Pharisees, stuck in the Torah, unable to think outside the box.
- The parents, stuck in their fear, unable to speak out.

Each represents us in some way.

What stands in the way of knowing God's love is not blindness, but self-deception: When we think we are strong ... when we think we are righteous ... when we think we have sufficient faith and understanding to make it on our own ... that's when we are sure to come up short.

Only as we are willing to fall on our knees and rely on the mercies of God will we ever know the peace of God's grace and love. As Moses told the people of Israel, "Don't be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of Yahweh, which he will work for you today...Yahweh will fight for you, and you shall be still." (Exodus 14:13-14)

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Look to Jesus, whatever situation or circumstance we face, and he will help us know what to do, what to say, and how to respond, so as to experience the fullness of life and the joy of his salvation.

Let us pray –

Father, by your Holy Spirit enable us to be made whole by focusing on you and allowing your praise to be at the centre of all we say and do.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.