
Sunday 22nd March 2020.

Readings: John 9 and Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.” “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked. He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.” “Where is this man?” they asked him. “I don’t know,” he said.

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So they were divided.

Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replied, “He is a prophet.” They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. “Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?” “We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.” He replied, “Whether he is

a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this 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?" Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

Reflection

It has been very difficult this week to resist feeling fearful. Each time we listen to the radio, turn on our televisions, read the papers or look at social media we are confronted with the latest figures relating to the spread of the Covid-19 virus. We hear of the unprecedented measures being put in place by the government to slow down the spread of the virus, and we've all seen the empty shop shelves and panic buying. But panic and fear are not from God.

This morning's gospel reading is about two kinds of blindness. On the surface we have an account of man who is healed from physical blindness, as Jesus spits on the ground, makes some mud with his saliva and puts it on the man's eyes. His physical blindness is healed. But on a deeper level, we have the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees, who resist healing. You may be familiar with the expression 'There is none so blind as those who will not see'.

The Pharisees question the man repeatedly. They want to know how he received his sight, who healed him and what the man thinks about this Jesus who has healed him. Their reaction is steeped in fear, fear about who Jesus is. They cannot believe that he is from God because he healed on the Sabbath, and completely miss the point that Jesus has performed a miracle in restoring this man's sight. Fear is also seen in the reaction of the man's parents, who when questioned, pass the buck, saying that he can speak for himself.

Against this reaction of fear, we can see the gradual recognition from the blind man as to who Jesus is. He calls him "The man they call Jesus" (v11) and says "He is a prophet" (v17). In v33 he acknowledges that Jesus is from God, as otherwise "he could do nothing". The healing of his spiritual blindness culminates in verse 38 as he proclaims "Lord, I believe" and he worships him.

Jesus refers to himself both in this chapter and in the previous one as 'the light of the world', words that take us back to the first opening verses of John's gospel and the promise that 'The light shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.' (1:5). Panic and fear are not from God. Peace and hope are. We are all to a degree spiritually blind. For each one of us there are things that can block our view of the light, such as fear, indifference or self-centredness. But Jesus is willing to come to each of us, to bend down, to dig in the dirt and to restore our sight so that we can see him for who he is. And we, perhaps in the current climate more than ever are called to be light for others. So, I leave you to consider the following question.

How can I be light in my community this week? Is there any practical support I can offer? Who can I pray for?