

## Sermon for Lent 4 Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2017

Given by The Revd. Sarah Shaw

**1 Sam 16: 1-13**

**Ps. 23**

**Eph. 5: 8-14**

**John 9: 1-41**

The passage we heard from John is full of questions. It starts with the disciples asking Jesus, 'Who sinned, the blind man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Then, following Jesus' healing of him, people ask the man's *parents* what has happened to him. Many, including the Pharisees, ask the man *himself* what happened to him - over and over again. They just don't seem satisfied with his simple answer! 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see,' says the man of his encounter with Jesus.

The Pharisees admit they don't know who Jesus is or where he came from, but decide, 'He cannot be from God – he has healed on the Sabbath.' A man is healed, yet, all the Pharisees can do is ask the man time and again what has happened - and be discontent with the answer! The man himself, on the other hand, could only say what Jesus had done for him.

The problem was that, for all their questions, the Pharisees already had – as far as they were concerned - all the answers. Firstly, they suspected that the man could see all the time – he hadn't really been blind. Secondly, they wanted to know what sin he had committed. They had already made up their mind about that, too, if it turned out he had indeed been blind! Thirdly, they condemned Jesus from healing on the Sabbath anyway.

Ultimately, the Pharisees failed to see what was before them. A man's life - changed. And not *just* because his *physical* blindness had gone. For the man who had been blind, the good news was that he saw Jesus, too, for who he really was. That was the even greater gift. When he and Jesus are reunited, the man declares his faith in him as the Son of Man. And Jesus' statement says it all: 'I came into this

world so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’. The Pharisees are the ones who are truly blind – blind to the man, blind to Jesus, and blind to what has happened. It is easy to believe we know who Jesus is or isn’t, who is or isn’t saved, what is the right and proper way for Christians to behave, and what isn’t. But when we fall into that trap we are like the Pharisees.

Likewise it is striking that the very first thing the disciples ask when seeing the man born blind is, ‘who sinned?’ By asking *that*, they are trying to work out who had gone wrong. The subtext is ‘Tell us what we should or shouldn’t do in order not to be like that. Tell us what we should or shouldn’t do, for our children not to be like that.’ However, Jesus is clear that the man’s blindness is nothing to do with sin.

This is not because Jesus didn’t care about all that goes wrong in people’s lives that hurts them and others. On the contrary, Jesus called people – calls *us* - to holiness. And on this day, Mothering Sunday, we may be reminded that God is our ultimate parent, and that part of belonging to his family means being subject to discipline. In Lent, particularly, we are called to be open to that – open to what God wants for us whatever that may require of us. But not because God doesn’t want us to do ‘naughty’ things, or spoil our fun. Instead he desires us to become our true and best selves. It is in the ‘opening up’ of ourselves to him – in deeper prayer and searching, that wonderfully, miraculously, God uses of all our brokenness – individually, and the world’s – to reveal his own glory.

So what can we learn from this passage, to apply to our lives as disciples of Christ this Lent?

Firstly, we need to be willing to open up to God, in weakness, and in vulnerability. To ask him to change *us* as he would have us be, rather than make judgements about who is ‘in’ or ‘out’. We need to admit we don’t have all the answers, and to ask for discernment, not judgement. Let’s allow ourselves to be vulnerable to the parent who loves us beyond what any earthly one can.

Secondly, we need to learn to *listen* to God. As we heard, the passage from John’s Gospel is full of questions from all the protagonists except Jesus and the blind man.

Yet no-one really seemed to be willing to *hear* the answers they were given, or to learn from them. It's important to ask questions of God – I believe he wants that from us! But we also need to be disciplined in listening. There are many ways of doing this. One is simply making yourself available to God in silence, spending significant minutes – as long as you can bear – in silence. Another is asking God to speak to you as you read Scripture. Sometimes you won't necessarily get an answer right away. And sometimes you won't get the answer you want, just as the Pharisees didn't! But ask, because you *will* be enriched and taken into a deeper place with God because of this. Why not try it – even 10 minutes a day, over the next couple of weeks!

Finally, let's ask God to see the world with his eyes, not with our own ways of seeing. As I said, the gifts of Jesus to the man born blind were two fold – yes, he could physically see, but now he also saw *Jesus* for who he really was. We too need to see how and where God is working, and how and where we can join him in bringing in his Kingdom. Part of that is learning to value the things that God treasures – rather than what the world considers important. In our society we value wealth, health and life. We tend to 'airbrush out' sickness, addiction, depression, and poverty. We don't always see God's ability to transform those things because in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, those things have already been overcome. We don't always anticipate God's desire to glorify himself through changing the lives of those people bound by such things. We pray for lives and situations to be transformed, but how much do we really believe they will be?

So let us pray this Lent for greater openness to be transformed as the blind man was; for listening hearts and minds to hear God's words to us; and for eyes to see the world as God does - in his all-embracing, compassionate love.