

(In)Sight and blindness

12 March 2023

INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

How do we see the world? Usually it's through our eyes! ... whether people, food, natural beauty ... but sometimes we don't see or understand things even when they're right in front of us ... it's like we're blind to them ... until we're told how to look and then suddenly we can see ... like this image ...

Jesus was good at noticing people, especially the ones other people walked by without seeing. In today's Bible story, Jesus sees a man who has been blind since birth. He probably had to beg for food. Jesus rubbed some mud on his eyes and prayed that God would restore his sight. After the man washed his eyes he could see! But this got Jesus into trouble because he did it on a Sunday when you weren't supposed to do any work.

Let's hear what happens ...

BIBLE READING

Isaiah 42:1, 6-7

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations. ...

I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;
I will take hold of your hand.

I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,
to open eyes that are blind,
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

John chapter 9

See separate reading

MESSAGE (in)sight and blindness

The world is a **beautiful** place if we take the time to really look. People are amazing in what they will do to help others.



But the world is also a **terrible** place as humans inflict cruel suffering on others for their own benefit.

Can we see both aspects or do we sometimes become blind and fail to see the good – or the bad?

Physical blindness takes away our ability to see much of the beauty around us. It has many causes – many of them preventable or curable – ranging from **cataracts** to **glaucoma** – the eye disease that I suffer from, where high pressure in the eye gradually – but painlessly – kills off the retina.



It is by God's grace that I discovered I had glaucoma some 15 years ago. I took my youngest son Jesse to the Royal Show when he was about ten and he spotted a community health expo and wanted to have his eyes tested.

His eyes were perfect – mine not so much.

There is another form of blindness that's just as debilitating ... and it's called **prejudice**.

Many people suffer from this type of blindness, which is often taught to them by parents or their peer group. Prejudice may be racial or social or religious and it happens when we think every person in this group or

that group is lazy or untrustworthy or dangerous. Unfortunately most of us carry prejudices, whether we recognize them or not. It's one reason we need each other – to point out our blindspots.



Today's reading from John is a beautifully crafted story about prejudice and insight and faith. It's actually two stories told side by side – the story of a blind man who is healed by Jesus and the story of the Pharisees who investigate the healing. Interestingly, Jesus himself only appears briefly at the beginning and end of the story, despite the fact that the story is very much about Jesus.



The story begins with the airing of a **very old prejudice**.

Jesus sees a blind beggar and presumably points him out to the disciples who assume that his blindness is caused by **sin**.

In their minds, the only question is whether the blind man or his parents are at fault. This prejudice features in several religions and

cultures – whether seen as karma or an understanding of God where bad deeds are punished.

Jesus doesn't buy into the prejudice. Rather, the man's blindness is an opportunity for God's **compassion** and **grace** to be revealed. In the language of John's Gospel, it is a chance for God's **life** and **light** to shine through Jesus. The man is healed by Jesus and can see ... perhaps for the first time. But as is often the case in this Gospel, that is only the beginning of the story.

As we have come to expect, the healing creates both **confusion** and **division** among the Pharisees who begin investigating how Jesus has once again broken one of their many rules against working on the Sabbath. Their **prejudice** is quickly apparent – Jesus cannot be a man of God since he has broken the Sabbath laws ... and yet ... how could he perform such deeds without the blessing and power of God working through him?

As the Pharisees investigate the healing, they speak to the formerly blind man twice and also to his parents. As they do, they dig a bigger and bigger hole for themselves as their prejudice becomes more pronounced. They decide that Jesus **must** be a



sinner for breaking the Sabbath laws and decide that the man is also a sinner – from birth – both for being born blind – a sign of God’s judgment – and then for daring to disagree with their judgment of Jesus.

Meanwhile the blind man **grows** in **faith** and **insight**. Jesus has healed his physical blindness but has also brought new **light** and new **understanding** to the man. He initially suggests that Jesus must be a prophet because through Israel’s history prophets such as Elijah and Elisha were known to heal people.

When he is pressed further, he keeps coming back to the **truth** of his own story – he **was** blind but **now** he can see – and surely God works through people who seek to do God’s will rather than through sinners.



When Jesus later catches up with the man and explains that he is the **Son of Man** figure – as described in the book of Daniel – the man believes him, calls him **Lord** – the most common name used for God in the Scriptures – and worships him. He has moved from **unbelief** to **faith**, despite being disowned by his parents and

neighbours and rejected by the Pharisees.

In John’s Gospel he becomes a **model disciple**.

The final word in the story belongs to Jesus who repeats that he has come into the world to help people to see – using the language from chapter 3, he is the **light** that will point people to God so they may be saved and have eternal **life**.

He has also come to bring God’s judgment against those who refuse to come to the light but choose instead to remain in darkness. ‘Surely you don’t mean us?’, ask the Pharisees. Well, replies Jesus, you claim to be able to see, you claim to be followers of Moses, yet you are blind to what God is saying and doing through me. So yes, in reality you are blind and remain in your sin.

There are several insights that we might draw from this story.

One is that there are different types of **sight** and different types of **blindness**. What we see – or don’t see – through our physical eyes is one type of sight. We see the people who come to Helping Hand or attend the weekly lunches here or the people

we pass when we go shopping, but we don't usually know the full background or struggles of these people. Perhaps we see a needy person or a lonely person or sometimes we might see someone exploiting our kindness. Or perhaps we don't see them at all – they are invisible to us.

Jesus didn't make distinctions. God doesn't make distinctions, but rather loves everyone. We're called to do the same.

Another insight is that Jesus is always opening a window to help people see God. Yes, today's story is about Jesus and whether he is to be trusted. But the story is also about **God** and who **acts** for God and who **reveals the character** of God. Our challenge, then, is to be people like Jesus who bring light and life to others and so point them towards the love of God.

A third insight is that faith is always a **journey**. It's rarely static. We are either moving **closer to God** and to the ways of Jesus – as the blind man does in the story – or we are moving **further away from God** – as the Pharisees are in the story. It's okay to be confused sometimes, or to have doubts sometimes, or to need some time out ... but where are we on our journey?



Following Jesus will never be easy – it will always need us to exercise our will and make positive decisions to keep following Jesus despite the cost.

This takes **courage** and **perseverance**.

Fourth, we need the insights and encouragement of others on the journey of faith. As we look around the community of faith and our wider circle of people we interact with, what sort of people do we see? Are we inspired by those who reach out beyond their comfort zone to help others? Are we inspired by those whose faith is persistently nurtured by prayer and quiet reflection? Are we inspired by those who seek justice for those with no power or voice? Are we inspired by a new believer or by a person who has faithfully followed the ways of Jesus all their life?

Whoever inspires your faith, give thanks to God for them.

And be thankful for signs of God at work in your own life.

And finally, remain open to the insights and light that Jesus brings to us, through God's Spirit at work within us and amongst us.

Amen.