

## Lent 4A 2023 SFX

### *Man born blind*

St John's Gospel operates at many levels of meaning. You may find, as I do, that it is easy to get lost in its narrative. But that is because there is such a richness to the text, treasures waiting to be discovered within it. Last week we circled around the theme of Christ the Living water in the story of the Samaritan woman. Next week we circled around the theme of Christ the Resurrection and the Life as Lazarus is raised from his stinking tomb. And today we circle around the theme of **Christ the Light of World** as Jesus brings to sight a man who has been born blind.

But let's not get lost in the narrative. Let's find a thread through the narrative that can help us **see** a little more clearly. Because that is what today's Gospel is about. Not so much a man born blind, but **you and me born blind**. Humanity not seeing straight. And worse, thinking that we do.

The thread I suggest we follow focuses not on sight but speech. Zoom out, if you like, from the narrative and see the characters in the dialogue as they relate to each other. Or rather we should say **fail to relate**. It is about how different groups fail to relate to the man born blind. If you read it carefully you will notice how different groups **fail to treat him as a human being**. He is an outsider, a beggar, somehow defective and not worth listening to. Everyone talks **about** him and no-one except Jesus talks **to** him. We need only think of that provocative title of the former radio programme "Does he take sugar?" When for some reason an able-bodied person, however well-meaning finds it nearly impossible to speak directly to people with disability. I remember being in the county hospital with a doctor and trainees about my bed speaking about me but not speaking to me.

At the beginning of the story the disciples talk about him but they do not speak to him. Then when he is cured the neighbours talk about him but they say nothing to him until he speaks out and says *I am the man*. Then he is taken to the Pharisees and again they begin **by talking about him** rather than to him. The Pharisees summon his parents, but they **refuse** to talk about him. They say *He is of age, he will speak for himself*. And he does so even more strongly culminating in his confession of faith: *Lord, I believe*.

Jesus saw him as he was: **a human being, not an object**. This is the story of a man finding his own voice. He ceases to be the object of conversation and becomes a subject. And more than that: by the end of the story he is able to say "*we*." *We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshipper of God, and does his will, God listens to him*(v.31). God's creation is ultimately not of individuals but of a society, a community, a people. It is the ultimate call to recognize our human belonging.

Jesus spat on the ground and made the paste of spittle and put it over the eyes of the blind man. **This man was not meant for exclusion**. Jesus lets this man whom people had shoved aside find his sense of self and belonging. The *I* and *We* of knowing **who he was** and the people **to whom he belonged**. God works through Jesus to heal the human condition, bringing healing to mind, body and spirit.

We live in a world that so readily categorizes and caricatures. I know I often have to question my own thinking and my own attitudes. They knew the blind man only for his function, the inconvenience he represented, or as the occasional object of their good works. But Jesus sees the man. "*I have come to give sight to the blind*" he says. We pray for clarity of vision.

A student once asked a rabbi: "Master, when do we know the dawn is coming and night is past? When we can tell a sheep from a goat in the pasture? Or when we can tell an oak from a cedar tree?" The Rabbi answered, "No, when you can look into the eyes of a stranger and see he is your brother, she is your sister, then you will know a new day has dawned. Until that time comes, we are still in the night."

The survey that has been handed out today is a response to the comments that you made during the synod process in this parish. It asks about ways we can come together as a parish community, to move from being isolated selves to a place of belonging.

That sense of belonging is known by the mother's in the parish who try to create in their own homes a place of love and care. This is your special day today. May you all be blessed in the joys and challenges of parenting with your husbands and partners. There is no greater thing on earth than a mother's love, nurturing the next generation. The prayers of the parish are with you today and we remember our own mothers, many who have passed away but will always have a very special place in our hearts.