

Sermon for 26.3.17

The readings today are especially beautiful.

They each offer graphic imagery of the tender beauty of God.

In the Old Testament reading we hear that wonderful story of how Samuel is led by Yahweh out of his fear of retribution by King Saul to find and anoint David as the next king of Israel.

In psalm 23 we hear those beautiful words - the Lord is my Shepherd. And in our Shepherd, we shall not want. What Yahweh gives will be enough for us.

The words of psalm 23 speak about focused and total trust. And this trust comes from knowing the Lord as the Shepherd who has led us into green pastures – who has led us beside still waters and who has led us into the paths of righteousness. He has given us good food, good water and good paths. All is well in other words, for we can trust our shepherd.

The epistle speaks about being awakened by the light of the world, Jesus Christ, and enabled to see what was once covered by darkness. “Live as children of light - for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.” Paul encourages us.

And in the gospel story that we will explore more deeply, we hear about the miraculous healing by Jesus of the man born blind. This story is about the gift of faith which enables us to see as God would have us see.

The story begins to unfold when the disciples ask Jesus, *who sinned - this man or his parents that he was born blind.*

In the religious tradition of the day, suffering was attributed to sin either of the parents or of the man before birth. Jesus’ response to his disciples’ question however, denies this explanation and shifts attention from cause to purpose; this is an opportunity for God to act – he tells them.

Jesus proclaims to the disciples, “I am the light of the world.” Then, as if to give some weight to his statement, he puts mud on the eyes of the blind man and tells him to wash in the pool of Siloam and then he would see. And he does.

What then takes place is a drama in which the different ways of human response to Jesus as the light of the world, are played out.

There is much fear driven confusion and non- acceptance. Firstly the man born blind who can now see, is doubted by his neighbours. *Is this him? The one we all know who is blind - or is it someone else?* The man keeps insisting, *I am the man.*

His testimony is ignored and the neighbours take him to the Pharisees – *let them sort it out.*

How did you receive your sight? They ask. The man recalls the details, but his answer is not satisfactory. *Where are his parents?* The parents are brought before them, *Is this your son, was he born blind, and if so how does he now see?* The parents are afraid – they don’t want to be thrown out of the synagogue.

The parents answer with caution. *He was blind, and now he sees. Don't ask us how, ask him. He's of age.* So they call him back in, and tell him to give God the glory - and admit Jesus is a sinner. He won't. *I know I was blind and now I see,* he says.

So the Pharisees again ask, *what did He do to you, how do you see?* One commentary suggests that if the man with new sight had a lawyer, they'd object. *They're badgering the witness, your honor.* But the man repeats what he had already told them. *Why are you asking me again? Do you want to be his disciple?* They revile him saying, *we know who we follow, we follow the teachings of Moses, but as for this man we don't know where he comes from.* If we just pause here for just a moment, we can see how far away they are getting from what has happened. They are now into a theological argument - the fact that standing before them is a man born blind who can now see, one might say, has become irrelevant. They have gone too far off track, and they are caught up in themselves and what they know and like to argue about. They are blinded to the reality before them. They can't see for looking we might say, but what is really happening, is that they are containing, explaining and controlling, the inexplicable miracle that stands before them. The tragedy is that, blinded to the reality that faces them, they are also blinded to the reality of what this means in terms of new possibilities given in Jesus, possibilities that shatter all old fears, and all old life sapping explanations and controls.

The man who has received sight from Jesus however tries in his own language to open their eyes. *Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes...* At this they are incensed, they take great offense, they are on fire with indignation- *you were born in sin and you dare to teach us the ones who know?* He was no longer welcome in the Synagogue. Jesus hears this, meets up with him, and introduces Himself. I'm the Son of Man - and he believed Jesus and worshipped him. The story ends when some Pharisees come back to Jesus and express a little self-doubt. "Surely we are not blind are we"?

We notice that no one is given a name in the story, and therefore, I believe, each one of us is invited into this drama for a moment of self-recognition in the presence of Jesus. For this drama is not one that is contained only to a religious culture in the first century. We can in fact imagine ourselves in any part personally and corporately as a Christian community. If you are anything like me you probably play many parts in the drama.

There are several characters here: **the neighbours** who can't accept what has happened and want to shift the puzzle onto someone else to solve. **The parents** who don't want to make waves but rather save their place in the faith community at any cost. **The Pharisees** who

know what there is to know about these things and have built walls to make sure that what they know can't be disturbed or infiltrated. Even so there are some who concede there may be a crack forming "Surely **we** are not blind are we? And then there is the man whose eyes were opened to the light of the world and who testifies - yes I believe.

During this coming week in lent as we reflect on this – remember only to do so in the compassionate forgiving beauty of the king of glory, who is the good shepherd of the sheep and the light of the world, who opens up all possibilities to us through him, in him and for him.

The Lord be with you.