

## Worship for 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

### Happy Mothering Sunday!

I'm really sorry we can't be *in church* but we can still *be church* – the people called to be the Body of Christ – and to be ministers to share the good news with others.

Spend a few moments in silence, settling your body, heart and mind – getting ready for worship.

### Hymn 451:

Open the eyes of my heart Lord,  
Open the eyes of my heart, I want to see you – I want to see you.  
To see you high and lifted up,  
Shining in the light of your glory,  
Pour out your power and love,  
as we sing Holy Holy Holy –  
Holy Holy Holy – I want to see you!

### Prayer:

Spend a moment remembering all the good things that have happened this week.  
Give God thanks for all of them...  
The person who made you smile  
The daffodil that was SO yellow  
The phone call  
The freedom to pray and read the Bible...

Especially today we thank God for the gift of sight – for vision – for light and colour. God made every wavelength of light – and God made our eyes to see them – and our brains to experience the joy of colour... Thank God also for the wavelengths we can't see (think about the cameras that can pick up infra-red light and 'see' in the dark.

Thank God for flooding our lives with the light, warmth and energy of Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

### Bible reading

#### [John 9](#)

One advantage of doing this service at home is that you can read the Bible at your own pace. Or listen to it read for you on a phone app. You may like to read the whole chapter slowly several times to let it sink in – it is a long story. Or if you are with family – share out the 'voices' and read it as a drama.

## Thoughts on the Scripture

### Introduction:

Happy Mothering Sunday!

I have a fridge magnet and it says:

However old a mother gets – she always looks at her middle-aged children for signs of improvement...

Could it be – mothers never stop looking at us as children?

Or perhaps mothers know we are always growing?

Or – perhaps we should never stop growing/learning?

Mothers know that when a child is born, that is not the end, it's the beginning. It's the same with being 'born again' as Christians. It is the beginning of an exciting, complicated, sometimes painful journey of growth and change. Not just believing in Christ – but growing to become more like Christ.

The story of the man born blind – is a delightful, complicated and subtle story. The way John tells it – we know it's more than a straightforward miracle – it's a sign and a parable. It is one of the longest miracle stories – because it details people's response to the miracle. On the surface it is about a man who was blind from birth, and who Jesus heals. But we quickly realise – it's a story aimed at us – to teach us about spiritual blindness – and how God opens our eyes...

### God helps us see – but it's a process (not complete in this life)

Why do I say it's a process – surely – it's a simple before and after?

He was blind – now he sees. I was blind but now I see...

### Illustration:

Neurologist Oliver Sacks pointed out that this is a huge miracle. Because for an 'always blind' person to function as a sighted person they need not just healing of the eyes (the optic hardware if you like) but they also need teaching of their brains to understand what they are seeing (healing of their mental software).

So – a blind person who gets healed (by miracle or surgery) can see things but doesn't have the mental experience to interpret what they see.

So – they have trouble with distance and depth. They might reach out to touch something that is actually very far away – while knocking over the glass of water they didn't realise was so close. They misjudge steps and bump into walls because they have not yet learned to understand and interpret what they are seeing.

So – when God open’s our spiritual eyes – we still have a lot of learning to do to understand and interpret what we are seeing!

## **OUR LIFELONG JOURNEY OF SIGHT... growing into the light**

### **1) Growing revelation of who Jesus is**

Notice how the man grows in his vision of who Jesus is:

A man who healed me (I am grateful) (John 9:11, 15)

He’s a prophet (I’m confused) (9:17)

The anointed one anointed my eyes (literally christened them) (9:30)

Do you believe in the Son of Man? (9:35)

Kneeling at his feet worshipping.... (John 9:38)

### **2) Growing understanding of sin and grace**

As human beings we start off with a simple understanding of sin and tend to see a simple cause and effect:

someone sins – they get punished.

Some people can do well obeying a list of ‘does’ and ‘don’ts’ – but this is quite a small view of sin and often leads people into despair (because they can’t keep the rules) or into self-righteousness (I’m keeping to my particular set of the rules and I look down in judgement on those who don’t)

Jesus doesn’t bother about breaking the Sabbath law in order to heal the man.

Jesus doesn’t observe rules about uncleanness when he touches the leper.

In John 10:10 Jesus says ‘I have come that you might have LIFE – and have it abundantly’. So sin might then be anything that gets in the way of living in the fullness of life; anything that obscures the image of God in us; anything less than the full intention of God for our own wellbeing and the wellbeing (shalom) of the whole creation.

In the world God has created – there is some cause and effect – our human sin and ‘fallen-nature’ does have consequences – things go wrong – people do get hurt – but there are no straight-forward equations.

### **Examples**

In Africa: many people are blind because of Trachoma – a bacterial infection – which causes inflammation of the eye, the scarring of the cornea and frequent infections result in blindness.

It is most common among children (in some places up to 60% of primary children) and the mothers are affected too because they keep catching it off their children.

### **Whose sin caused them to be blind?**

Environmental risk factors influencing the transmission of the disease include:

poor hygiene

crowded households

water shortage

inadequate latrines and sanitation facilities.

### **Where is the sin?**

Perhaps the sin is our blindness to their needs – and the historic sins of exploitation by colonial power, or the current sins of global capitalism?

We like to blame those who are pushed to edges of society, those who beg for attention. If it is their own fault, we can walk by without feeling guilty.

Perhaps you are thinking about the corona virus.... Did God create it? Is it a punishment? My understanding at this stage (and perhaps we will come back to these questions another time) is that corona is a consequence of how humans live in the world – and a consequence of some of the ways we have exploited or mis-used creation. But I don't see it as punishment. Perhaps, taking a hint from Jesus in John 9:3, this is a time when the works of God might be revealed in us. We might 'see' things we have been blind to before now.

### **3) Growing revelation about our own identity**

As we get to know Jesus better (and there is always more to learn about Jesus) we also get to know ourselves better.

Spiritual blindness is not just about what we see OUT THERE – but IN HERE... in ourselves

### **Baptism - Christ in us**

The start of the man's journey of sight was the anointing of his eyes – and then the washing in the pool of Siloam – both have echoes of baptism.

About new birth – spiritual birth – from darkness to light,

I was blind, but now I see...

But also the beginning of being sent out – becoming apostle/minister of Christ

Siloam literally means to be sent forth – or be sent by God ...

### **When we are baptised into Christ – we are baptised into mission**

So we see how the man grows – in his confession of faith – witnessing to Jesus – telling others.

He is halting/hesitant at first, confused – but eventually is cheekily challenging to the Pharisees themselves:

‘I’ve told you already and you wouldn’t listen – why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples?’ ‘If this man were not from God he could do nothing’!

### **Conclusion:**

The Pharisees could not see Jesus – they were blind – because they had a very fixed idea of what ‘The Messiah’ would look like – and very fixed ideas about their own ‘rightness’. They fail to learn, grow and change. The man in the story is, by contrast, an excellent example of what a disciple of Jesus might look like. He asks Jesus for help. He allows Jesus to touch him. He obeys Jesus instructions to go and wash himself. He begins to see, physically and spiritually. He worships Jesus, and becomes a witness and an evangelist.

What about you? How do you see Jesus? What is Jesus trying to say to you personally through this scripture? Do you need to ask Jesus for help? Will you let Jesus touch you in a strange and unexpected way? What may Jesus be asking us to do – for our own healing, and the healing of the world?

### **Let us pray:**

O God, grant me an undivided heart to love and serve you today with all my heart, mind, strength and soul. Open my eyes to see you and serve you in the ordinary people and events of this day. May your love live in me and radiate through me. Amen.

### **Sing:**

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now I’m found  
Was blind, but now I see!

### **Prayers of Intercession:**

Pray your own prayers – remembering that God knows our needs before we ask – and God gives us immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine.  
Pray for mothers – for women who have children, for women who have lost children, for women who have longed for children but had none. Pray for those who have no mother. Pray for all those who find Mothering Sunday difficult for whatever reason.

God is like a mother hen – longing to gather us up under warm downy wings and keep us safe.

In this time of uncertainty – may we know the certainty of God’s presence with us.

In this time of fear – may we hear God’s voice saying ‘fear not – I am with you always’

Pray for all those whose work will keep others safe while they put their own health at risk.

Pray for a spiritual vision to grow in us as the rest of our hectic lives slow down a little.

Pray for family, neighbours and friends  
For our church family

For those who have died – we give thanks – and ask for comfort and strength for those they have left.

And we pray all in the precious powerful name of Jesus.  
Amen

## **The Lord’s Prayer**

### **Hymn 66**

This, this is the God we adore,  
Our faithful, unchangeable friend,  
Whose love is as great as his power,  
And neither know measure nor end:

‘Tis Jesus the first and the last,  
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home:  
We’ll praise him for all that is past,  
And trust him for all that’s to come.

### **Blessing:**

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding – keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ.

And the Blessing of God  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Be with you all – now and for ever more. Amen.