

22 March, 2020

Revd. Bernard Fidder

Dear Church Family,

As we do not have a service this week, I thought I might write to you and let you have my sermon notes that I was going to preach this week.

But please read chapter 9 of the Gospel of John first.

### **Introduction**

Our thoughts this week have been focused on the Corona Virus outbreak. The week before last, we were told to stop shaking hands, and may wash our hands much more. Sporting activities like the Football and the F1 motor racing were cancelled. Adriana and I were going to a Dunamis conference last Monday, and we considered carefully if we could attend, or if even the whole event should be cancelled?

And when we got there, we heard the news that all the church services and meetings were to be stopped. That raised for the whole conference the question whether we should cancel and go home. But the conference centre was not closing and as we were already together and isolated in the centre, we carried on. And I am glad we did, as we had a wonderful time, and many of the participants were invited by God in a deeper relationship with him.

But now we are back in normal life, and dealing with the fact that all the church activities including worship are stopped. I would not have thought that this was possible a week ago. Surely people will want to come to church when bad things happen in society. And you may think back to the time in the war when churches always remained open.

However, we have decided to open the church up for private prayer, on Sunday mornings from 10:30 – 12:00pm and Tuesdays – Thursdays from 10am – 2pm. Just so that people can come and be in the presence of God and pray.

But in this time of turmoil, you may also ask yourself, why do these bad things? And to all of us, whether we are Christians or not! In the end everyone has the same chance to get ill

with the Corona Virus, whether they are the most devout Christians or the worst imaginable criminals.

### **Man born blind**

The story of Jesus and the Man born blind tells us something about this. Here we read about the interaction of Jesus with the man born blind (we don't know his name), but curiously the story shifts its focus from Jesus to the healed man and his struggle to be accepted as a healed person in society. This is a story about how the blind man comes to accept that Jesus is the Messiah, or as Jesus called himself the "Son of Man". This term referred to a future figure whose coming will mark the beginning of God's final judgement. And Jesus states that he is that person.

But the story begins with Jesus noticing the blind man. The blind man does not ask to be healed, but when the disciples point the man out to Jesus, he spontaneously puts mud on his eyes and tells him to wash it off in the Pool of Siloam, in Jerusalem.

When he does, the man's eyes are opened and he can see! But he does not know who Jesus is. His family and neighbours ask how it comes that he can see and he refers to 'man they called Jesus' – He is just as surprised about being able to see, and is also wondering who this man Jesus is.

But when the religious authorities (the Pharisees) ask him who he thinks Jesus is, he demonstrates a development in his thinking: he has come to the conclusion that Jesus must be a prophet.

When they question him a second time, he challenges the Pharisee: do the want to become Jesus' disciples!?!?, which rubs them the wrong way: "No, you (the healed man) must be his disciple". Again his thinking may have progressed, because the man does not deny this and defends Jesus by reasoning that in order for Jesus to heal his eyes he must have come from God! "If this man were not of God, he could do nothing". This enrages the Pharisees and they throw him out of the Temple.

At last Jesus seeks him out and asks him the question: Does he believe in the Son of Man? to which he replies (after having ensured that Jesus speaks about himself that): yes, he believes in him and he then starts to worship Jesus. He has come to realise that Jesus is the Messiah. If Jesus was just a prophet, the men would not have worshipped him. The man's speaking and actions however show that he truly believed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Christ.

### **Jesus is the Son of Man**

A major subject of this story is about the authority that Jesus has to heal people. Initially people doubted that healing had taken place, and they thought that the newly seeing man was someone different than the blind beggar. Once the Pharisees were convinced that he was one and the same, the issue was not if he was healed or not, but the identity of Jesus.

Initially the Pharisees disagree with each other as well: one group said that Jesus was not of God because the healing took place on a Sabbath – and according to Jewish law and customs no work should be performed on a Sabbath. This was a major sticking point between Jesus and the Pharisees, as Jesus consistently healed people on a Sabbath. But another group of Pharisees asked: how can a sinner do miraculous signs?

So they double check with the parents – who, afraid of the Pharisees, tell them to check with their son – he's an adult after all.

When they talk to the man again, the Pharisees state that Jesus is a sinner – presumably because he has healed the man on a Sabbath day – and therefore cannot be of God. To which the man replies: "all I know is that I was blind and now I can see: so Jesus must be of God."

It is through the signs and miracles that Jesus demonstrated that he is from God. But people did not like that because Jesus did not comply to the rules that they expected the Messiah to also comply to.

### **Why do bad things happen to good people?**

This story also refers to an issue being ill is related to being sinful. According to the Pharisees bad things can only happen to bad people. Now that we are in the grip of the

Corona Virus – and as said before – we realise: everyone has the same chance to get ill, weather they are the most devout Christians or the worst imaginable criminals.

But the logic of the Pharisees also fall short: this blind man's sin could not be the cause of his blindness: he was born blind. That's why the disciples ask: If he was born blind, how could he have sinned? And if he could not have sinned, did his parents' sin cause the man's blindness?

We can also see the same attitude with the Pharisees, who, when they throw the man out of the Temple: "You were steeped in sin from birth!", indicating that they also believed that he or his parents were sinners. Maybe this is also the reason that the parents don't argue with the Pharisees, as they knew that the Pharisees blamed the family for the man being blind.

But Jesus gives a different reason: the man was born blind so that the work of God might be displayed in the man's life. As through his blindness and his healing he became to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

People often look for God when things are going wrong. We may find that in this time of the virus, people are starting the ask questions about God and the meaning of life. We can think that is hypocritical: people do not believe in Jesus when things are OK, but when things go wrong in their lives they do believe in Jesus. And here Jesus almost says that this is maybe one of the reasons when things are not well: so that people have a reason to search for God. The blind poor man without work is healed and finds Jesus, but the Pharisees – whose lives would have been ordered and fine, deny that Jesus is the Son of God.

### **Jesus is the light of the world**

This story starts with Jesus statement: While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. What do we need light for? To see the truth, which is hidden in the darkness.

The story ends with Jesus saying: "For judgement I come into the world, so that the blind will see, and those who see will become blind"

He says this just after the healed man recognizes (sees) that Jesus is the Messiah. There are two miracles in this story. Firstly that the man regained his physical eyesight, but secondly that his spiritual eyes are opened and that he sees that Jesus is the Son of God: “the blind will see”.

Jesus brings judgement, but every single person determines the outcome of that judgement: do we see that Jesus is the Son of God, and worship him for who he is? Or do we, like the Pharisees, harden our hearts and do not want to see Jesus for what he is. In that case, like the Pharisees, our guilt remains.

So in this time of uncertainty we have great opportunity to witness to Jesus. As unlike those who do not know Jesus and accept him as their Saviour, we have done so. We may fear the process of getting ill and even dying, but we know that through Jesus’s forgiveness we are saved and assured of our place in heaven.

And even when we get ill and have to face our own mortality, we know that he lives and is always with us. We can pray to him for our health and for the health of our loved ones. He also helps us with our fear, as often we suffer more through fear than the actual illness!

J John (Anglican priest and evangelist) wrote this week that “Perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18), but he also wrote that the opposite is true: “Perfect fear drives out love”. Yes, we need to take precautions, and follow government advise. But we do not need to let us be driven by fear. As the perfect love of Jesus drives out all the fear. Now that we cannot meet physically anymore, let us continue to encourage encourage each one other and pray with each other. We can do this by phoning each other or using other means of modern communication. By doing so we demonstrate Jesus’ love to each other.

Because if we do not, then Jesus’ enemies will have won a major battle for our hearts. So let us let Jesus love rule supreme in our hearts instead.

**Amen.**

**God bless you in this difficult time – Revd Bernard Fidler**