

'Seeing what matters'

Reflection: March 19, 2023 Rev'd Ian Brown

John 9:1 – 41 & 1 Sam. 16: 1 - 13

Well, blindness and seeing are the focus for today. One of those fairly normal but probably unhelpful things we do as human beings is, we often question whether others are blind to what we can see. How can people be so blind, polluting the planet? How people not see their selfishness? How can people not see the truth? But seeing is a multi faceted and complex phenomena.

From the Hebrew Scriptures today, we have a story with a focus on seeing. Samuel, the aging prophet, priest, and former Judge of Israel had been asked by God to anoint a successor for King Saul. This first venture into the realm of kings had not altogether been a happy one for Israel, or for Saul. Now Samuel goes to the household of Jesse and sees a number of fine young men, but none of these are the one God wants and he has to seek out the youngest. The theme; that God sees what we don't.

Think about who is doing this. Samuel was the last of the Judges of Israel. Under his leadership the people demand a king; strike one. Political transitions are rarely easy and this was a disaster. Saul, the one anointed, didn't last as king at all well. Strike two. But Samuel is still given the job of anointing the next king; a third and risky chance.

Then we hear of Jesus bearing this truth out even further; that God sees where we fail to. This is the third of John's "people encounter Jesus" stories we've had in a row. There was Jesus and Nicodemus, where the challenging word of Jesus was that this leader should be born anew. There was the woman of Samaria at the well, where Jesus freely offers her the opportunity to respond to God's gracious offer of "living water". A demand to the religious expert, a free offer to an outcast woman, and now the story of the man born blind. Without even a request, Jesus gives him the gift of sight.

A demand - an offer - a compassionate, transforming action.

In this story we have a man who has been in darkness, brought into the light, while those claiming to have the religious light are shown to be heading towards darkness. As a sign that he is the light of the world, Jesus gives sight.

Jesus and his disciples are walking along the road, they happen to pass a man known to be blind from birth. But consider how he got there, his perspective. This is a miracle story, but the miraculous is never the point in John's stories of Jesus; amongst the disciples the conversation is around the theological question of whose sin caused his blindness. Today we would see that question as blasphemy. God does not afflict us or our offspring because of our wrong doing! But in the first century it was a valid query.

Jesus first answer is verbal truth, that he is the light of the world. His second answer is truth in action; to give sight to the blind man.

Jesus uses the dust of the ground to give new life. Just like God created Adam from the earth, it's another echo of God's creation in Genesis. John shows Jesus bringing the new creation into being in word and deed.

Jesus, the light of the world, brings light to others. More than anything this is the gospel enacted – it's good news seen in reality! Jesus brings new sight, new insight, new beginnings.

The story goes on to a debate with the Pharisees about whether healing was work and should it be done on the Sabbath? Jesus is a radical, he breaks the religious conventions in favor of peoples needs, he argues his case and shows up the blindness of the leaders, whose interest is more in the law than the people it was made to help.

Humans go on asking about the blindness of others - why can't they see like us? You've heard these questions: why can't the Israelis see the injustice done to the Palestinians? Why can't Putin give up his murderous ambition? Why is the threat of deforestation not taken more seriously, plastic in the oceans – can't we see what it leads to?

But some 'see' in very practical ways too:

We support the work of the Christmas Bowl each year. Its Act for Peace program is active in Sudan helping the Sudan Council of Churches to bring new light, here's a few examples:

- 150 Peace educators, including women have been given human rights training
- Over 1000 teachers have been trained and placed in schools around Sudan

Reverend Peter Tibi, of the Sudan Council of Churches says, *"We see tribes and ethnic groups who were fighting with each other, now living together harmoniously... Children taken by other families during the war have been reunited with their own families."*

Act for Peace is also working in Darfur, through their Emergency Response Operation:

- 60,000 community members have been involved in nutrition education, hygiene and preventative healthcare sessions.
 - 280,000 people have received access to water and improved sanitation.
 - 100 new water points established and the rehabilitation of 160 hand pumps, giving safe water for drinking and cooking.
 - 9,000 loos have been rehabilitated 3,000 new ones constructed.
 - Farmers received training in improved techniques, seed banking and pesticide treatment.
- Two community-owned nurseries have
- produced 90,000 seedlings to combat deforestation give shade and fruit.

People who have experienced much darkness, being helped to see new hope. It still happens, reminding us, that along with the man born blind – wherever people have to take second place to rules, there is something fundamentally wrong and blindness is in control. And where sight is given, that still points to Jesus.

I wonder though are we, like Samuel was, sometimes looking for the wrong characteristics? This part of the human condition is much the same as it was. Many suffer because some refuse to see. Looking at the needy we meet and helping where we can. As in the gospel, we need the healing of this light of the world – we and our

whole world needs much enlightenment, much healing. The faith illustrated here is, Jesus, the light of the world, will shine, will bring healing and hope. Like for Samuel, we are given many new chances too.

In a time of ongoing pandemic, it's good to remember that when Jesus was asked, 'whose sin caused this man's affliction?' Jesus clearly says, no. It was not anyone's sin. God is in the business of healing, bringing light and hope; shining in the darkness, not causing it.

Jesus light may challenge us at times, like it did for Nicodemus. Jesus light always offers Gods' free gift, as with the woman at the well. Jesus light makes a difference and brings new healing, wholeness, new sight and new understanding as he did for the man born blind, as we are helping in Sudan and even here around us.

May Jesus shine in and through us, so we too might say of Jesus, "I was blind, but now I see." Amen