**Sunday 26 March 2017**

**Lent 4**

***Prayer before worship:***

*Be our vision, Lord of our minds! May we see things as you see them: discern in the ebb a flow of life the Providence that knows our every need before we ask; look upon both neighbours and enemies with compassion; recognise in the beggar, stranger, hungry and homeless the face of the Child of God; and look in the mirror and see a much-loved disciple called by Christ to an abundant life. Healing Christ, anoint our eyes with your salve, that we may see better than ever before, Amen.*

**Welcome**

**Call to Worship**

Some people have excellent eyesight but do not see further than their noses...

Some have sight yet choose to see only a fragment of the truth and love of Christ.

And some there are who have no physical sight yet who see brilliantly.

The light of Christ Jesus be with you all.

*And also with you.*

One thing we know for sure,

*once****we were blind but now we can see.***

**Songs of Praise:** You are the Christ

Let the weak say I am strong

**Opening Prayer**

Lord, we are here, gathered by the river... drawing near to the living water...

We are not sure how deep we really want to go...

How much we are willing to let go our grip of the shores’ safety

In order to find the freedom of risk.

So draw us forward –eyes wide open,

For You Jesus are the One worthy of following.

Open our hearts

Open our minds

Open our ears

Open our eyes

Open our hands

So that we may receive what is needed for us to be the generous people you call us to be,

In your strength, may we be lifted high above common wants and expectations, into the light and power of your Presence.

Lead us to wonder, and from wonder to love, and from love to that worship that only lovers can offer.

In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord, Amen.

**Notices**

 **Birthday Basket**

**Leprosy Mission Update**

**God @ Work** Rose Drown, Leprosy Mission

**Offering and Dedication**

With you as our shepherd and by sharing our gifts, we can indeed anoint others with grace, prepare feasts for the hungry, welcome the stranger, and love those we consider to be our enemies.  Bless these gifts, and use our lives for others, we pray.  Amen.

**Re-membering** Micah 6:8

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
    And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
    and to walk humbly[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Micah+6:8#fen-NIV-22657a)] with your God.

**Time with the children** Jesus and the man born blind

After he can see- he ends up telling his story again and again and again –coz some stories are worth retelling

Choosing not to see....

Some stories are worth telling again and again –do you have a fav thing you like to draw? I used to have a dog I liked to draw...

Do you have certain jokes you tell again and again?

Do you have a dad who tells the same jokes again and again?

e.g. Why did the chicken cross the playground –coz he wanted to get to the other slide

when we have something really great tho –like knowing God loves us... it is worth repeating!

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Song:** The blind man sat by the road and he cried

***Children leave for Young Church***

**Powerpoint Reflection** Psalm 23

**Bible Reading:** Ephesians 5:8-14

**Prayer of Confession**

We make our confession, not to plead for mercy like beggars, but as God’s own children who need to level with themselves and, like the prodigal son, return home to the open arms of the One who loves us beyond all measuring.

Let us pray.

God of glory and God of grace, bring us to our senses.

If that means shining your light fiercely

until our inner eyes hurt,

and our ugly ways stand exposed

then so be it.

We do not look for an easy way

but the hard way of truth and healing.

Slowly but surely we come to you.

In your arms may we find the grace to let go,

to accept your forgiveness and receive restoration.

This we pray in the name of Christ Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

My friends, there are no half measures in God. All or nothing. “While we were still unrepentant sinners, Christ died for us.”

In the name of Jesus, step free for the shadowy past and turn to the bright future with keen eyes and optimistic hearts You are a forgiven people.

Thanks be to God.

**Song:** Open my eyes Lord

**Bible Reading:** John 9: 1-41 We read together...

Divide into groups to read parts of - the Disciples, Jesus, Neighbours, Pharisees, Parents, and the Blind Man.

**Sermon:** Making Disciples Week 3:

Jesus and the man born blind

**Hymn:** Thou whose almighty word

**Prayers of Intercession**

# A prayer for the world in the aftermath of the attack at Westminster, by the Moderators of the United Reformed Church UK -

Dear Lord,

Our hearts go out to all those directly or indirectly affected by the atrocities in London on Thursday. We pray especially for those killed or injured by this senseless and indiscriminate violence, and for their family and friends. God who cares, we particularly remember the family and friends of PC Keith Palmer.

God of Compassion, be with them; let them feel your presence, let them feel your peace and grace eradicating the evil that engulfed them.

We give thanks for the selfless courage of the police and security forces – and we pray that you will give them the strength and resilience to continue their sacrificial work.

Gracious and Loving God, we ask for your grace to permeate London, ensuring that our diverse community will recognise this cowardly act for what it was, and continue to live together peacefully, independent of race, colour or creed. Amen

And now let us bring before God the faces we know well, those we know a little, those on whom we have passed hasty judgement, and faces to whom we cannot put a name. And let us seek God’s blessing on all.

The kindly faces who have loved and nurtured us; family, friends, neighbours and workmates, those on earth and those in heaven.

The faces of opponents who have mocked us or shunned us, abused us or betrayed us, exploited or ignored us.

The TV faces of hungry children overseas, or street kids in our cities, or children

living in poverty here in NZ.

The faces of those who suffer from leprosy around the world.

The faces of our elected politicians, Government and Opposition, minor parties and independents.

The glossy magazine faces of sporting idols and film stars, royalty and fashion models, and the newspaper faces of those who have fallen into public shame.

The faces of those whom we have ignored or injured, or who have been the target of our superficial judgement or gossip.

The faces of those within this church who have been an inspiration to us, and those who more often get under our skin and annoy us.

Give them and us good sight, loving God, and may we all see your glory.

Loving God, these are all your children, cherished with a priceless love. Through each of them, and through your whole human family, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven Then indeed we shall be blest beyond anything we can as yet see or imagine. Through Jesus Christ our Saviour, Amen.

**Hymn:** Be Thou my vision

**Benediction and sung Amen**

We are numbered among those whose eyes have been touched

with the salve of Jesus Christ.

So see clearly and walk gently wherever you go this week.

Look gladly on those who encourage,

and deal patiently with those who irritate.

See light where others see gloom, and hope where many see defeat.

Look upon weak souls with mercy and face the tough charcaters without fear.

Travel calmly with the confidence of those

who have caught glimpses of a divine glory,

in and through Christ Jesus our Saviour.

And may the grace of Jesus redeem you,

the love of God undergird you,

and the friendship of the Holy Spirit empower you, Amen.

John 9:1-41

**Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind**

**9**As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2**His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

**3**“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. **4**As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. **5**While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

**6**After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. **7**“Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

**8**His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” **9**Some claimed that he was.

Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”

But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

**10**“How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.

**11**He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

**12**“Where is this man?” they asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said.

**13**They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. **14**Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. **15**Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”

**16**Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”

But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So they were divided.

**17**Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.”

The man replied, “He is a prophet.”

**18**They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. **19**“Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?”

**20**“We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. **21**But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” **22**His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. **23**That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

**24**A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”

**25**He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

**26**Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

**27**He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”

**28**Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! **29**We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”

**30**The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. **31**We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will.**32**Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. **33**If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

**34**To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

**35**Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

**36**“Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

**37**Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

**38**Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

**39**Jesus said,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%209#fen-NIV-26480a)] “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

**40**Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”

**41**Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

**Sermon**

So here we are in week 3 of the four weeks on making disciples –as we look at the way Jesus related to different people in different situations. We have looked at Jesus and Nicodemus, and we have looked at Jesus and the woman of Samaria... and today we are looking at Jesus and the man born blind.

I wanted us to dramatise the text because like last week it is a story that seems to lose a lot if just read... hopefully reading it the way we have, it will be heard in a new way for you. But even the translation has skewed our understanding of the text... And as I have been sick this week I didn’t manage to include another translation on the powerpoint.

But as you may know, the text in the original Greek didn’t have it divided into verses –but nor did it have punctuation, so commas and full stops have also been added later –much later –the verses weren’t added until the 1700s. Many scholars now choose to go with the Vulgate inspired sentence structure of the opening verses –so it reads-

*As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”  Jesus answered them, “It was not that this man sinned or his parents.”*

*But in order that the works of God be displayed in him, as long as its day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.”*

Jesus is making it clear –some things just happen –no one is to blame. Creation is broken. And we misunderstand the text if we assume it means that this man was blind so Jesus could do the miracle.

And while I’m on the text, let me also say that this passage is a typical John type method that starts with a sign and then is followed by a discourse which explains the sign. We actually need to read on a bit more to get the complete discourse though... regarding the true shepherd. And in true Johanine fashion, there are 7 scenes in the story –the number of wholeness.

And hopefully by doing a reading theatre, you were also invited into the text in a new way –and perhaps will find yourself reflected in the characters in a new way too.

Let’s take a look at the characters in turn...

1. We start with the disciples –and they start with the question –as they see this blind beggar on the side of the road- they ask who is to blame... who sinned to make this happen? –was it the man himself –or should we blame his parents? They see human need, and they turn it into a moral argument. There is no compassion, no acts of kindness or justice, just –whose fault is this?
2. Jesus –in contrast, pushes beyond the disciples’ response. It is no one’s fault. Some things just happen. –But for God to be seen, we must do the work while there is time... Yes, bad things happen –but it is up to us to respond in such a way that shows God. And with dirt and spit –and touch and words, he brings healing. And then he asked the man to be part of his own healing too –he is to go to the pool of Siloam to wash. And he is healed.
3. Then we have the neighbours –those people who have seen this blind man year on year sitting by the temple gates –who had probably thrown a few coins to him when they had some spare... and now he had become the news of the day... they argue if it could really be the same man... there is no celebration of his healing... just arguing over the pros and cons from a distance.
4. The Pharisees enter next – as the neighbours drag the now seeing man to stand before them... they, with their tight set of rules, in which there is no room to comprehend what has happened... in defence mode and ready to close down anything that doesn’t neatly fit their guidelines. They too find no reason to celebrate the healing. They are more worried about it having happened on the Sabbath –when no such work is to take place. So instead they opt to argue that he is a fake... and so they call for the proof of his parents.
5. Enter the parents –thus summoned, they acknowledge the man is their son, and that he has been healed –but they do not know how... They know nothing of Jesus and are keen to say –talk to our son, not us –he has the answers. They don’t want to be there at all and are keen to get out of the spotlight.
6. And finally there is the man himself... who has been blind from birth. He refuses to get caught up in the game playing of the other factions... for him it is enough to have the truth of his own healing. Jesus had anointed his eyes, told him to wash them in the pool of Siloam and he can now see. No amount of questioning changes that. He is happy simply to repeat the story he knows. One thing I know, he says, once I was blind, and now I see. And he is excommunicated for his story –banned from the temple where he has always found his security.

The drama ends with 2 more scenes... the first is Jesus hunting out the healed man and gives him another level of sight. The man becomes a disciple of Jesus.

And then the Pharisees arrive to spy on Jesus while he preaches for he has acted outside the rules. They are going to get rid of this man. It is not surprising that he is preaching on spiritual sight and blindness. They ask Jesus if he thinks they are blind... Jesus looks them straight in the eye and says, if you were blind you would not be responsible for your actions... but you are –you just refuse to admit what you see.

So what does all that mean in terms of how we see disciple making...

**The first thing** that stands out for me is that the relationship between Jesus and the man born blind starts with the disciples’ questioning about sin –their wanting to judge... wanting to blame. The assumption of the day was that suffering came as a result of sin. What they were not sure about was whose sin had caused such a defect from birth. And so this issue of need that the disciples come across, brings them to judge him instead of reach out to him.

And I ask myself -how often do we do that? How often do we debate the “issues” around those who suffer... –who is to blame... rather than entering into the reality of the actual person or people who suffer... and seek to bring wholeness.

**And the second thing** that leaps out to me about making disciples, is that any such activity that transforms people may well have wider repercussions... The reality is that there are always others on the periphery who are somehow also part of the conversations we have... so how do we deal with the other layers of involvement –the neighbours, the families, the gate keepers... the people who watch from the side, and judge... and how do we deal with the repercussions on the new disciple too? Even the most amazing transformation God does will be judged by others... and we will need to help pick up the pieces –Jesus took time to go back to the man –now able to see, but in all sorts of trouble because of his new sight. Disciple making is being involved with the person for the long haul, however difficult. There appears to be no simple happy ever after...

**Thirdly,** is the issue of following the rules-or not... Jesus very clearly was breaking the rules when he healed this blind man. when do we/should we break rules? What rules are okay to break?

**And finally**, I have to ask, when am I the blind one? When are we the blind ones? With the Pharisees we too much ask, Are we blind too? When are we unable to see the good things happening in our midst because they go against how we think they should happen. We are so tied to how we think things should happen we fail to see God at work in our midst. What are we blind to?

And more than that, given Jesus’ response to the Pharisees about blindness, how much do we choose not to see rather than not actually be able to see?

There are some challenging questions asked of us as we dare to enter the text.

Question I hope you will grapple with at study groups during the week.

So be it, Amen.