

Sermon 30 March Ps 23 John 9:1-41 "Learning to See"

Prayer: Lord you give sight to the blind, help us to see more clearly your ways in our world. Teach us to choose and act wisely so that we, too, when speaking to your reality take our part of the healing of your people. Amen.

Learning to see how Jesus see's is a life-long faith calling for us who trust him enough to follow him in our daily living. It is a courageous journey because how Jesus see's thing – life, universe people, relationships, rules and regulations is different to the world's view. "In *Mandate to Difference: An Invitation to the Contemporary Church*, Brueggemann provides ^{another pairing} for our consideration, the contrast between the dominant version of reality and the "sub-version" of reality. We live and breathe in the dominant version, and we are all "to some extent practitioners of that dominant version of reality [that] comes at us in many forms; if we conform to that dominant voice of reality, we may receive its surface gifts of well-being and security for a while." (KMatthews -Huey)

Brueggemann's suggestion that what we see around us, what we're told and what we think we want and need may not be the real truth that underlies everything. The difficult thing is that, for many of us, the dominant version has been very good, very reassuring, very comforting. The sub-version might be quite uncomfortable for us, which is one of the reasons we are sometimes uncomfortable during the season of Lent. Lent is our time for a self-audit of looking at and checking to see if what we do as faith individuals is in alignment with Jesus.

The Biblical teachings in the past few weeks has been opening for us the 'visible / worldly version of Jesus teachings and the invisible faith version underneath – the sub-version. *Living as we do* with the world's dominating vision **it is hard** to keep our sight subverted to Jesus vision. I believe our only real hope is to commit ourselves to a life-long walk of trust in Jesus and His Father by the Holy Spirit's guiding, to commit ourselves to our faith community for challenge, comfort and strength. And we do this by the sharing with others; our worship, prayers, mission engagement with and in the world. We do it by having friends walk with us in winter's darkest valleys and summer's glorious plains.

We live in community as much as Jesus and the blind man did, *and* we struggle with our community as much as they did for instance: One of my sources (John Petty) reminded me that Jesus had Pharisees travelling with him. Usually the phrase in verse 40 is translated as '*Some of the Pharisee's near him...*' but it should really be translated as "**the ones being with him.**" We know John in his Gospel has already told us there were pro-Jesus Pharisee's, e.g. Nicodemus.

Jesus immediate community included some Pharisees, listen again to the "Jesus: Pharisee" interaction as explained by J Petty: "The Pharisees "with" Jesus express surprise and incredulity that they might really be blind. "Surely, we are not blind, are we?" Jesus reply is cryptic. Being blind is not a sin. Saying "we see" is." **Ouch** – a true Lenten challenge for some of those who were **near enough** to be following Jesus.

Keeping our sight in the dominant version of the world, including 'our' view which we justify with religious belief and refusing to see Jesus version **is a sin**, for those who are *near enough* to trust and follow him. **Yes**, keeping our eyes on Jesus and his ways is uncomfortable because the security and comfort Jesus offers is not the same as what else is available in the dominant world view.

But our comfort and security of faith do not reside in our rules and regulations, our ability to quote Bible verse and chapter –as the Pharisees and 'Jews' were doing this for the 'Blind' man. Jesus cuts right to the point telling them how **he sees things**. Right at the beginning of our Gospel text today Jesus teaches that our comfort and security come seeing how / when the glory of God might be seen in us. The glory of God seen through us, by us so that in us Jesus' sub-version of reality takes shape, is given form, is made real and visible by the whole world.

When this happened for a man born blind – it caused a storm in his community. Jesus' act of random kindness – he was just walking past when he worked the work of God, and a man's life was forever changed. Jesus **wanted** people to see God at work, but most of the 'others, the parents, the neighbours, the Pharisees and the Jews want to hide one way or another. Whether it was avoidance – the parents 'we don't know – ask him' or the rules arbitrators – it's all about sin and breaking rules and has nothing to do with our God'. They refuse to see what Jesus sees, so their view becomes limited to the world they acknowledge and the sad part is that they are diminished in the process.

The one who grows is the 'man' and his relationship with Jesus. Jesus starts in the blind man's testimony as 'The man called Jesus' and finishes with the claim that Jesus is Lord in whom he trusts enough to follow and worship. He starts blind and finishes being able to see according to Jesus!

Faith does this for us – not belief in rules or regulations or a following of the Book – but a following of the one who wrote the book. Faith is all about the relationship with the Living God in Jesus, who wrote and is still writing the book – *in my opinion!* This story has a real 'rule' breaker within, the one that says we must come to Jesus to be made whole – to be saved. In this story **Jesus** sees a man born blind, and **works** the work of God. As a direct consequence the man is all but rejected by his parents and thrown out of his worshipping community and **Jesus finds** him – *again*.

Learning to see what Jesus wants us to see / how Jesus wants us to see is a life-long challenge of faith that is built upon our relationship with HIM. He will find us – no matter how far we have wandered away or how 'blind' we have become. It is not the worldly dominant view that tells us Jesus cares for us, loves us, finds us no matter what, it is a faith view based on generations of experience over thousands of years.

I would guess some of you have heard this little parable – I rather like it. It's called in this version "**Do You Know the Shepherd?** [John 10:11-18, 27-30](#)

The time was the late 1800s. It was a time before most of our modern forms of entertainment - before movies, before television, before the internet, even before radio. Entertainment consisted of traveling groups of actors who went from town to town.

One such actor went into a small mid-western town. The town hall was packed, the audience was wildly enthusiastic as the orator recited passages from great plays, poems, and literature. At the end of the performance, they shouted for more. The actor agreed to take a few requests.

Immediately, a hand shot up. The hand belonged to an older man with a weather-beaten face and clothes that were clean but definitely patched and had seen better days. "Would you... could you...do the 23rd Psalm, please?" he asked.

The actor thought for a minute, then said, "I'll do it on one condition. After I have finished, you will come up and recite it, also." Puzzled, the old man agreed.

The orator began, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...." As he went, he infused the words with all the tricks of his art. One by one, the phrases known and loved by all rolled off his tongue. "He leadeth me beside the still waters, he restoreth my soul... Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

When all the words of the great beloved Psalm were delivered with great art, the audience gave the actor yet another enthusiastic ovation.

Then the man who had requested the Psalm came up. His face was not handsome, and his voice was thick and uncultured. Yet, as he began to speak, his face took on a glow of joy, and the love almost leaped from his mouth with the words.

When he concluded, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in house of the Lord forever." the only sound in the hall was the rustle of handkerchiefs as they brushed away tears.

The silence was finally broken when the actor stepped forward and said, "Now you know why I wanted him to follow me. It's just as I thought. You see, I know the Psalm, but he, he knows the Shepherd."

May your eyes be opened to see and discover trust enough to worship and follow. Amen.