

Service - by the Reverend David Le Poidevin

The eyes of the blind receive sight

Call to Worship

The eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the lame will walk like a deer and the dumb will shout aloud. Waters will spring up in the in our hearts wilderness and torrents will flow in the desert. The mirage will become a pool, the thirsty land bubbling springs; instead of reeds and rushes grass will grow. (Isaiah 35/5-7)

Bidding Prayer

Lord Jesus, we experience so much, we see so much, yet we often remain confused, Come to us in our searching and help us to see the way forward. Help us in our worship to meet Jesus and receive his light. (Partners in Learning 1999 Jan – May page 87)

Come to us Lord Jesus open our minds that we may understand, open our hearts that we may love you and in loving you come nearer to you. (Roots for children 2011 page 30 April 3)

Adoration

Lord in your love and goodness you have put us in a Universe full of glory and in a world full of wonder. God of all goodness we bring you our praise. In your love and goodness you sent your son our Saviour Jesus Christ. He came to heal the sick, to give hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb and sight to the blind. God of all goodness we give you our praise. In every generation you have continued his work through your people. You have given skills to some that enable many to enjoy life. more fully. God of all goodness we give you our praise.

(Michael J Townsend Companion to the Lectionary volume 6 Worshipping God together page 210)

Confession

Father forgive us that so often we close our eyes to the needs of people around us. We harden our hearts towards people who need our love. Forgive us Lord that we so often fail to notice what is staring us in the face. Help us to recognise the darkness in our lives that we may always be ready to receive the light of Christ. Open our minds to recognise the ways in which we can help others. Open our hearts to know the joy of the fellowship that we share. (Peter Sheasby – Companion to the Lectionary Volume 5 All Together for Worship page 170)

A Prayer before the Sermon

Lord open our eyes to see your glory, open our ears to hear your word, open our lips to proclaim your praise and open our hearts to receive your love.

(Michael J Townsend Companion to the Lectionary volume 6 Worshipping God together page 220)

SERMON: The Blind Man Receives Sight

Biblical Passages - John 9/1-11, Ephesians 5/8-14.

Any form of human suffering or disability inevitably leaves many people with the same question that was asked by the disciples of Jesus, on meeting a man blind from birth. The question we want to ask is why?

Sometimes perhaps if someone has done something dangerous and ends up with an accident the why may more likely become 'why did you do it, when you knew it was dangerous? Wars and human aggression such as the modern plague of knife crime, may likewise cause human suffering. But this man was born blind so the disciples ask Jesus the inevitable question why?

There are a number of human conditions, which like the man's blindness go right back to their birth and some conditions are inherited from one or other parent. This man had never seen anything of the lovely things that are there to be seen. They were all inevitably hidden from him. Small consolation perhaps that the same applied to anything that one would rather not see. At best he could perhaps only imagine what things might look like, but having never seen anything in reality, what could he imagine?

So the disciples raise the question as to why it is, in God's wonderful creation, that some should be born in this way. There is a human instinct in us all that wants to be able to give an answer for everything and even sometimes to cast blame for anything that we see as being not ideal or wrong. We want to know the details of what, why, when and where?

All the suggestions that might have been made as reasons for the man's blindness might well be very interesting to speculate, but what help would they have provided. If Jesus had done that and nothing more, the man would still have remained blind. The response of Jesus was to ignore such speculation and instead to do something about it. Then as we shall see, at the end of it all the man was able to say 'now I can see'. For him that was all that really mattered and it meant so much more than a host of suggestions to the question Why?

On March 5th I was watching 'Question time on Television as I usually do. Someone raised the point in regard to any tragic situation in which people ask a not too dissimilar question to that asked on this occasion by the disciples. The question that is sometimes asked is 'where is God in all this'. The person who raised this then gave his own answer, 'God is there when we ourselves do something positive about it'.

We may not be able to understand the whys and the wherefores but like Jesus we can grasp every opportunity that arises to show God's glory and compassion in overcoming such things. Jesus was showing that God cares and is able to make that care effective in the human situation that was there before him.

Hilary Murphy assistant priest at the Anglican Cathedral in Bloemfontein, South Africa relates an occasion in the township of a lady living in the most awful circumstances. Rats were living in the mattresses that she lay upon in her home, a little tin shack. The whole situation she says was utterly shocking. The lady herself turned to Hilary and her colleague and said 'I don't believe there is a God any more, I have been abandoned'. Hilary spoke to her of Jesus and prayed with her. They left prayers and scriptures for her to read, but more important they loved her and cared for her and gradually the light in her eyes began to shine. One day she said 'I think I had better start believing in Jesus; look what he has done for me, I am living again!'. Now she was seeing, her blindness had gone because Hilary was not satisfied to say Why, but acted as Jesus would and enabled the lady to see that God was there and was doing something about the situation through Hilary and her colleague.

Some religious beliefs of course see suffering of any kind as a punishment for sin. A great deal of the teaching of the Pharisees tended to take this approach. Jesus by contrast was more concerned with displaying God's love and compassion for the man. Rather than attempting to give an answer to the disciples' question 'Why', he displays God's power to deal with it. While the Pharisees condemned people as sinners, Jesus always shows compassion and pity. He didn't come to explain a reason for everything, but to do the works of God, as he was clearly doing on this occasion.

If we had read all 41 verses, and you might like to do so in a quiet moment, we would have noticed that even after the man born blind had received his sight questions were still being asked by various people. First of all some of his neighbours simply asked 'is this the same man that they had known'? Then he was brought before the Pharisees who also wanted an explanation as to what had happened, especially as it was the Sabbath day. Then they also interrogated his parents. They then returned to questioning him and he gave the only sensible and logical reply that he could make, 'once I was blind, now I can see'. Even then they still wanted to know 'How'?

After all the questions that people wanted to ask the man, he wasn't interested, any more than Jesus in giving them any theological or biological explanation. All he was interested in was this simple and straightforward fact, 'now he could see'.

This encounter with the blind man and giving him vision enables Jesus to illustrate his teaching by this action and his claim to be the 'light of the world'. Sometimes when we look at the world and tragedies that occur it can seem somewhat dark and depressing. We see only darkness, misery and fear. But when we see the light of Christ shining out, then we begin instead to see brightness and hope. All around us we see the glory of God and his love in action. He is able to clear away the darkness for he is the light of the world.

After the Sermon

All seeing God, take from our lives all that shuts out your light. Help us to walk in your light. Take away all that creates darkness within and let your light shine from our lives.

(International Bible Reading Association 1999 March 14th and 18th)

Thanksgiving

Creator God, we thank you today for all your gifts to us., for sight and hearing, smell and touch and taste. All things that we so often take for granted.

We thank you above all else for the gift of Jesus, who lived among us and showed us how life could be.

We thank you for your Holy Spirit, alive in us and in your church to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable and to challenge us.

For all your gifts we give you thanks. (Roots 2011 April 3rd page 26)

Intercessions

Loving Father, You see all things, you see us and you love us.

We pray for those who have hard choices to make; scientists involved in ethical decisions, world leaders involved in disputes, parents making decisions about their children, the judiciary making judgements, ourselves faced with choices about the environment.

We bring before you those who seem to have no choices: the prisoner, the sick, the hungry, the refugee, the victim of violence, the subject of prejudice.

We offer to your care those who feel rejected, and some who will need to change the direction they were taking and find a new path.

We come with our hopes and our fears and offer them all to you.

(Roots 2nd March 2008 page 3)

God all skill and science flow from you. Prosper the work of all who search into the wonders of the Universe and who research ways of bringing healing to those in need.

Deliver people from the prejudice which hinders progress.

Bless those agencies which are able to restore the wholeness which is health and peace for many. (Source unknown)

Petitions

Lord Jesus, friend of the friendless, helper of the poor, healer of the sick, whose life was spent in doing good, teach us to follow in your footsteps. Make us loving in all our words and deeds, strong to do the right, gentle with the weak, and kind to all in sorrow that we might be like you, our Lord and master Jesus Christ. (Source unknown)

Closing Prayer

Lead us Lord from darkness to light, for evil to goodness, from death to life. Send us out in faith to witness to Jesus whom faith enables to see for ourselves.

(Peter Sheasby – Companion to the Lectionary Volume 5 All Together for Worship page 171)