

John Chapter 9

¹ As he walked 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 Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' ⁹ Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' ¹¹ He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.'

¹² They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' ²⁰ His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' ²⁵ He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' ²⁶ They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' ²⁷ He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' ³⁰ The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' ³⁴ They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

Spiritual Blindness

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' ³⁶ He answered, 'And who is he, sir?^[1] Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' ³⁷ Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' ³⁸ He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.'

READING MINSTER | SUNDAY 22 March 2020
REFLECTION ON THE GOSPEL READING

Has there ever been a stranger Mothering Sunday, at least in peace time? Instead of a mass movement of adults back to the family home, we've all been urged to be 'socially distant' – and many parents find themselves in enforced isolation. Affection and appreciation have to be expressed from afar. Flowers and chocolates are replaced by texts and phone calls.

Of course, there are many for whom Mothering Sunday always brings feelings of isolation – women who have been unable to have children or who have lost a child – those who have never known tenderness from a mother – those who have lost a dearly loved Mum. Perhaps, this year, the privileged amongst us are getting just a small taste of what it is like to feel bereft while others are celebrating.

Isolation is something of a theme in today's Gospel reading. 'Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' asked the disciples. I wonder how the blind man felt when he heard the insensitive question? No doubt it was a speculation he had heard many times before. He may well have grown up with the uneasy feeling that he was a curse on his family. There he sat at the side of the road, dependent on the occasional goodwill of passers-by, spoken of as if he were an object with no feelings to be hurt. What a lonely and isolating position to be in.

'Neither this man nor his parents sinned' replied Jesus. I believe the blind man's healing began at this point. What a thrill must have gone through him when he heard that word 'neither'. Jesus pronounced a 'not guilty' verdict and the weight of years of accusations and insinuations must have fallen from the blind man's shoulders. And Jesus Christ comes to each of us with the good news of a 'not guilty' verdict. We all act in ways that put distance between ourselves and God, between ourselves and other people. Through Christ's death, each one of us can hear God pronounce us 'not guilty'. We can begin a lifetime's pilgrimage in which we learn to live lovingly with God and those around us.

Sadly, while Jesus brought freedom and healing to the blind man, many others in the story chose to react in ways which perpetuated his isolation. It must have been so hurtful when the parents refused to stand in solidarity with their newly-healed son. The religious rulers reacted by interrogating and insulting him and then expelling him from the community of the synagogue.

The global pandemic has the potential to increase suspicion and selfishness. Alternatively, we could see an increase in compassion and acts of kindness. We have already seen both responses on our news bulletins. As people who have experienced the love and forgiveness of God, let's be those who spend our times of social isolation working out how to reduce the loneliness and isolation of others – not just during this crisis, but into the future.

Let us pray: Father God, thank you that, in Christ, you reached out to us in love and compassion. Show us how we can extend that love and compassion to others, especially those who are lonely and anxious. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.