

Fourth Sunday in Lent
Year A - 26/3/2017

1 Samuel 16:1-13
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

Many of you will know that last year we cared for Willa - the Labrador from Vision Australia who we hoped would go on to become an assistance dog for those with vision impairment. One of the reasons why we did that that was because of our friend, Andrew, who is himself vision impaired.

The relationship that he had with his guide dog, Eamon, was inspirational, and we hoped that we might be able to help put Willa on the path towards being the eyes of someone like Andrew. One of the things that always astounds me when I talk to Andrew are the stories that he tells of how people, apparently intelligent people, see him with his dog and somehow equate the disability related to his sight with a more general disability that might somehow render him incompetent to do anything, including to think!! So they yell at him, just in case he is deaf as well, and assume that he can't make any decisions for himself.

It goes to show, I think, that there is a real difference between sight and vision - how one can have impaired sight, but retain incredible vision - and on the other hand, how one can have 20/20 sight, but lack any sort of wider vision. It is the difference, in today's story, between the man born blind, and the Pharisees.

Today's gospel reading is a well-known story. The man born blind is healed by Jesus - it is on one levels about transformation from blindness - (non-seeing) - to seeing. But of course, it is not just a story of a man who was cured of physical blindness. It is above all a story of a man who was enlightened by Christ and came to faith in him.

The amazing thing about the story is this: the man born blind saw more than the religious leaders, in the sense that he saw the goodness in Jesus and had more faith and insight than they had. Like my friend, Andrew, the assumption was that because this man was born blind he was in some way incapable of faith, belief, or understanding.

Jesus had a very different idea. The Pharisees may have had perfect eyesight, yet Jesus called them blind. To see well, good eyesight alone is not sufficient. I think we would all agree that there are many forms of blindness besides the physical.

For example, selfishness can blind us to the needs of others; insensitivity can blind us to the hurt we cause others; pride can blind us to our own faults; prejudice can blind us to the truth; thinking ourselves better than others can blind us to their equal dignity and worth; and materialism can blind us to spiritual values.

All these things and more can do to the windows of the eyes what curtains do to an ordinary window - they prevent the person inside from seeing outside. We can indeed have good eyesight and yet fail to see so much that is good, true, and beautiful. Unfortunately, we all have many blind spots.

“Who are you going to believe... me or your lying eyes?” The classic Groucho Marx one-liner captures the Pharisees’ frustrated, blind rage at Jesus in today’s gospel. They have an image of Jesus as an interloper, a threat to their leadership. They refuse to see the clear hand of God in his wondrous healing. They refuse to hear the word of God in his message of love.

And because no one is as blind as those who will not see, the Pharisees are the blindest of the blind. In their blindness they stumble about in anger and ignorance; striking out at the man cured of blindness, his family and ultimately at Jesus.

If we also can be so blind regarding the things of the external world, how blind then can we be when it comes to the world of the spiritual?

The most important eyes are the eyes of faith. Jesus said that he came to open the eyes of the blind. He wasn't talking about the physically blind only, but all those who had lost their way in life and could no longer find their way to God. So often we are blind to God's presence in the world. Then along comes Jesus to open our eyes, 'I am the light of the world,' he says.

John makes it easy for us to see the message of this gospel. He draws a sharp contrast between the blind man who now sees and the Pharisees who never will see. The cured man sees through the eyes of faith. He has become a disciple. The Pharisees' vision is totally obstructed by the cataracts of pride. They are in deep denial. Christ puts mud in the man's eyes... and he sees.

Christ performs wondrous signs for all to see... and the Pharisees are still blind. If part of our calling is to shine, then surely we must see with the eyes of faith. And when we 'see' from a faith stance, we 'see' beyond the colour of a person's skin, or their gender or status - to the person 'within'. We see beyond the Jesus of the gospels to the Jesus who desires to be a part of our lives, saving, renewing, transforming us in ways we never dreamt were possible - and without Christ - they're not possible.

At the conclusion of our gospel reading, Jesus remarks that he came to bring sight to those who do not see, and to question the vision of those who think that they do see. Into which of these categories do we fit? Hopefully into that to which Paul also calls us, when he says: "Live as children of the light for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth."

This is my prayer - for today, for us all...

Come into our lives, Lord Jesus, and enlighten us with your amazing grace so that we can truly live as children of the light. Amen