

John 9:1-7 - 9th a. Pentecost. 29th July 2007

Jesus - the light of the world

¹ 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 work of God might be displayed in his life. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the work 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 Having said 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. [NIV]

We live in a time of great enlightenment: we have learnt that its wrong to look down on people because of their disabilities. We have an enlightened constitution which ensures that all people have equal rights, and that people who have physical disabilities have full opportunities for employment. Shopping centres and public buildings are built with an enlightened attitude with parking spaces for the disabled and entrances which have been made ‘disabled-friendly’.

We also live in a enlightened times which make it possible to test whether a foetus will be born with physical defects, and then have the ‘enlightened’ choice of legally aborting - killing! - the foetus. There is even talk of medical aids prosecuting people for allowing ‘defective’ children being born.

It is because of this level of ‘enlightenment’ which is based on the thinking of people - a thinking which through the fall into sin has steadily declined into the darkness where others are neglected and marginalised - that our Lord had to come into our world. Because of the darkness of our lives and of the world around us, God sent

Jesus as the light of the world

He came to restore sight to the blind.

He came to open our eyes to see the true light - how God wants things to be!

Jesus restores sight to the blind

A person who had been born blind has always been a special case - it was unheard of for such people to be healed as we hear later on in this story. Such people were considered to be right at the bottom of society - obviously they had been punished by God, so it was believed.

Apart from the blind, we too have people who suffer from what are deemed to be incurable diseases. In spite of the many advances in medicine, there is still no help for many forms of cancer, and above all there is the threat of AIDS which hangs over our country and our world. Recently I heard that for every person who receives treatment for AIDS, there are three who don’t get treatment - it is claimed that AIDS is out of control not only in Africa, but in the whole world.

How then can we claim that Jesus came into this world to restore sight and to heal, if there are so many examples of disease and of death because of these incurable diseases? The theological answer to these questions is that not all the blind, not all disabled and sick have been, or will be, healed in this world. Jesus healing these people is a sign of a new time that has started - the miracles of healing point us to the future, when there will be “no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

While being pointed to some time in the future, when all diseases will be healed, may be of little comfort to those who suffer now, the healing of this blind man has special significance. People believed that a person born blind was so steeped in sin that surely there was no salvation for them. Yet, by healing this man, Jesus shows that God has not set such people apart for special punishment.

Not only is this man, blind from birth, healed - Jesus heals him on a Sabbath! The people around Jesus were concerned about the theology of the guilt of a person born blind, but Jesus concern is to show us the theology of God’s love and caring.

So we are to know with absolute certainty that people who suffer from incurable diseases, that those who are blind or suffer from any other form of disability, are not special cases of punishment by God. In fact our Lord turns our attention to those who have disabilities. He has made it our business, as His church, not to simply have our correct forms of worship, and of observing Sunday, but that we are to bring His help and His loving touch to those who live broken down lives.

Jesus came to heal people from their diseases, but most of all he came to heal us from the spiritual blindness in which we find ourselves.

Jesus opens our eyes to the true light, and so that we would see the people around us with his eyes, and in the light of his love for them.

Walking in the **light of the LORD** - that is the theme of this Sunday. This light - which Jesus is - needs to pierce our darkness, only then will we be able to really see; only then will we stop being blind, even while we believe that we can see!

Jesus wants us to see the true purpose of our being here - that it does not involve having our correct theology, while around us people are neglected and ignored. That means first of all looking at ourselves in his light: seeing ourselves as He sees us, and not hiding behind the walls we have set up. There is a great danger of knowing about everything Jesus has done, of speaking of the light he brought into our world - and yet not allowing his light to shine into our lives.

People who are close to us know us - know of our faults and shortcomings. They see us from a different perspective. So often we just close ourselves off from their positive criticism - we don't want to hear about our faults, and so we attack them for their faults. Is that not what we do also when the light of our Lord shines into our lives - we try to deflect it onto other people and point out their faults. And we will probably always find those who have worse faults than we have - like this blind man, or like those who have AIDS.

In this story we see how the disciples seem to have known about this man - they knew that he had been born blind. Before them is a man in tragic circumstances - he had no way of making a living except by begging. As somebody who had been born blind, he was probably excluded from the worship at the temple - excluded from salvation?! Yet, to them he was not so much a person, as a case to be discussed - he was somebody in a worse situation than they were, and so they point him out to the Lord: who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Is that not how things still are all too often? We speak about the AIDS problem, about poverty and street children - these are cases to be discussed, but do the people involved really touch us. Are we not also deflecting attention away from ourselves as we ask, Who sinned?

Don't we often believe that it must be their own fault that people have AIDS or something similar? We speak of the scourge of AIDS, and secretly we may believe that people have got what they deserve - what their life-style deserves. But what about the people who live in tragic circumstances because of what has happened in their lives?

We are to have our eyes opened, to be healed from the blindness of turning away from the needs of the people around us. But that can only happen when we have allowed the light of our Lord to truly shine into our lives. Jesus brought us into his light to give us new life - he is the son which we need to have life. By his light we have been set free from the darkness which is characterised by fear, by selfishness, by mistrust of others - and often by hatred.

Jesus has brought his light into our lives - His forgiveness, His love and His care have become part of our lives. Now his light is to shine through us also on the people around us - we also are to be forgiving, loving and caring.

Have we 'seen the light' or are we simply 'enlightened' in the sense of our world around us, busy with what we think and want?

Jesus has come - His light shines on us. His light is there to lead us from the darkness of death to the new life He alone can give. May we truly see the light, and live in his light - for all time.