

Order of Service for personal/family use
Avoch linked with Fortrose and Rosemarkie
Meeting Jesus Changed by Jesus - John 9
Sunday 22nd March 2020 (4th Sunday in Lent)

Call to Worship

- “1 I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
2 My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.
3 O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.
4 I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.” Ps34 [KJV:Public Domain]*

Our theme this morning is Jesus’ meeting with the man born blind. Chapter 9 of John’s gospel explores light and darkness - seeing and being blind - and how meeting and believing in Jesus can transform our lives. Our opening hymn reflects the grace of God in lives changed by Jesus Christ – the promised one from God - in language found in the Old Testament and echoed in the New.

*“Hear Him, ye deaf: His praise, ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ.
Ye blind, behold your Saviour come; and leap, ye lame, for joy.”*

MP 496 O for a thousand tongues to sing (Lyngham) (follow lyrics on YouTube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4O9kw3cILpg4>

Prayer

Lord God we come into your presence this morning at a time of national crisis.
We pray that we can bless you and give you praise trusting in your care of our lives.

We come to God who is compassionate
and acknowledge our sins in penitence and faith.
SILENCE – CONFESSION

*“The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart God will not despise.”*

Lord God in this time of social isolation we pray that we might draw close to you
Father, Son and Holy Spirit and experience the fellowship that is shared by the trinity
in our own lives and experience.

We pray the prayer that Jesus taught us:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Word of God – John 9 – “Meeting Jesus - Changed By Jesus”

Bible Readings John 9:1-15

MP 1086 Light of the world you stepped down into darkness (follow lyrics on YouTube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaUTv1pXRyU>

Bible Readings John 9:16-42

Sermon - The man born blind: his testimony to meeting Jesus **– “I was blind but now I see!”**

John 9 - background

This is an unusual account. Despite dealing with the tragedy of a man who is blind from birth and the pathos of such a situation it leads to some of the most comedic writing in the whole New Testament.

- ⇒ In the man's encounter with the Pharisees it moves from irony to overt comedy - with the man who can see - becoming surer and surer of his ground and the Pharisees resorting to derision and scorn but never finding security in their own position.

Questions/ Discussions/ Actions

The opening of John 9 gives a description of Jesus' encounter with the man born blind. Questions are followed by discussion and actions. The disciples question whether blindness is caused by sin. Jesus explains that life and God's purposes are more complex.

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

6 Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert

- ⇒ The words of Isaiah 35 would be in the minds of early readers of John's gospel and should be in our minds as well.

Jesus - the Light of the World - bringing sight in the darkness

Jesus speaks of himself as follows: *"As long as I am in the world - I am the light of the world"*

When he had spoken he put on clay (anointing) the eyes of the man and told him to wash. We're told that the man went away and when he came back he could see.

- ⇒ It is clear from what happens that the neighbourhood now are confronted with a man who though blind from birth can see. There is no question that this man can see - the debate is centred on whether they have the right man.

Three Groups of People question the Man Born Blind

The neighbours, the Pharisees around different issues, the Parents and the Man born blind himself.

1) The Neighbours and their questions

The neighbours question the man born blind and he says:

A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight.

- ⇒ The neighbours were surprised enough to take him to the Pharisees.

2) The Pharisees and the Man born Blind

2A) *The Pharisees and the Sabbath*

The Pharisees seem to be perturbed that the healing happened on a Sabbath. In answer to their question the man says: *He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.*

⇒ But the healing on the Sabbath is a sticking point for the Pharisees.

2B) *The Pharisees and whether Jesus is a man from God or a sinner*

They have another question: *"What say you of him, that he has opened your eyes?"*

⇒ The man born blind responds: *"He is a prophet."*

3) *The Parents*

The Pharisees are open to confirming the man's identity and call the parents.

The parents' response confirms the blindness and the sight, but draws short of giving an answer.

"We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind:

But by what means he now sees, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself."

But there were religious pressures for confessing Jesus as the anointed one - the Christ and attributing healing to him risked this. *"For it was agreed already, that if anyone did confess that Jesus was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.* The parents find an interim solution: *'He (the man born blind) is of age - ask him.'*"

⇒ John's account is becoming humorous in the midst of the pathos ...

4) *The man born blind is questioned*

The man born blind is tested by the Pharisees on his religious stance: *"Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner."* His answer is revealing: *Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: **one thing I know, that, whereas, I was blind, now I see.***

The Pharisees persist with another question: *What did he do to thee? how opened he thine eyes?*

The answer is serious and hilarious at the same time with a real sting in the tail:

I have told you already, and you did not hear: where would you hear it again?

Will you also be his disciples?"

The Pharisees proclaim: *"We are Moses' disciples.*

*We know that God spoke unto Moses: **as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.**"*

⇒ The man's response pushes the Pharisees to the edge:

*Why herein is a marvellous thing, that you know not from whence he is, and yet he has opened mine eyes. Now we know that God hears not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and does his will, him he hears. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. **If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.***

⇒ This is too much for the Pharisees: *"You were altogether born in sins, and do you teach us? **And they cast him out.**"*

Interim Reflections – the three groups – neighbours, parents and religious leaders

Up to this point John is showing the response to the man's testimony as people question him.

- ⇒ The neighbours – they want to make sure he's the man born blind because if he can see that's fascinating and troubling – what should they make of it?
- ⇒ The parents – they know the man – they know that he was blind and they seem convinced that he can now see – but they are afraid of religious tradition and what will happen to them if they say that Jesus did it.
- ⇒ The Pharisees – they seem convinced the man can see but if Jesus healed him on the Sabbath, then that turns upside-down their ideas of religious norms – so they push against this solution with their questions and against the man's testimony.
- ⇒ In short, all three groups are **blocked** – they perceive the man can see and that Jesus healed him – but it is too scary for them to act on this knowledge – the neighbours pause, the parents prevaricate and the Pharisees pontificate. No-one seems able to move to faith and belief – despite the testimony and the evidence of their eyes.
- ⇒ John uses humour to show that they are **blocked** – irony is his method of prodding the reader.

Jesus and the man born blind

Now Jesus has a question for the man born blind: *"Do you believe on the Son of God?"*

The man answered: *"Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?"*

- ⇒ Jesus said unto him: *"You have both seen him, and it is he that talks with you."*
- ⇒ And the man said: *"Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him."*

Conclusion

Sometimes as individuals we **Meet Jesus** and we are **blocked** from being **Changed by Jesus**.

- ⇒ like the neighbours of the man born blind,
- ⇒ like the Pharisees who encountered the man born blind and
- ⇒ the parents of the man born blind there will be outside pressures
 - tradition
 - the opinions of others
 - religious scruples
- ⇒ like Nicodemus we may struggle to move from inherited religious paradigms
 - but if we fail to be changed by Jesus we remain "blocked"

In this story most people seem to have been **"blocked"** – except the man born blind.

- ⇒ the man born blind went from seeing Jesus as a healer, to a prophet, to the Son of God and he believed
- ⇒ the man born blind *"saw the light."*
- ⇒ *"He/she who has eyes to see – let them see ..."*

"May God bless to us these reflections on his holy Word."

Response to the Word of God

Our hymn of response, reflects the difference between the two in the life of the spirit. The writer, John Newton, was a ship captain involved in the slave trade – he had no illusions about his need to change – when he “saw the light” – he expressed the change in memorable words:

*“Amazing Grace – how sweet the sound – that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see.”*

MP 31 Amazing Grace (follow lyrics on YouTube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP95V-688hc>

Encouragement from the Bible - Ephesians 5:8, 11 & 13

⁸ For you were sometimes darkness, but now are you light in the Lord: walk as children of light. ...
¹¹ And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. ... ¹³ But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.”
[(KJV – Public Domain; pronouns adj.)]

Prayers for others

Lord God grant your church the strength to be a witness in our world at the present time
[... specific requests for our community]

Lord God grant your church the vision to reach out beyond ourselves in service
[... specific requests for our community]

Lord God we pray for those who suffer in the present pandemic
[... specific requests for our community]

Lord God we pray for those who minister to others in the present pandemic and especially health care workers and those who care for the sick and dying
[... specific requests for our community]

Lord we pray for ourselves that your presence would strengthen us and transform our lives
[... specific requests for our ourselves]

In Christ’s name we pray these things, AMEN

The Grace

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God our Father,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

MP 1086 Lord the Light of your love is shining (follow lyrics on YouTube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9H00QH4PaQo>

Benediction

At this time of uncertainty may you know the assurance of God’s grace in your heart,
God’s love in your life and God’s light shining and illuminating your way in the darkness,
and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with you all. AMEN.