

John 9.1-41

Jesus says he is the light of the world.

In our bible passage Jesus restores the sight of a blind man who sees Jesus for who he is. The sighted do not believe the man's story, and fail to recognise who Jesus is. Jesus tells them that they are spiritually blind because they do not believe in him.

Sunday 15 March is Mothering Sunday in the UK. Mothers, and all parents and carers, do many things that go unseen and unnoticed, and today's Gospel passage about Jesus healing a man born blind enables us to explore the themes of seeing and noticing, as we ask the question 'What do you see?'.

There was a little boy in a school nativity play and he had one line to say. He had to say 'I am the light of the world'. It came to his big moment and he froze. He couldn't remember his lines. His mother was sat in the front row urging him on. She mouthed the words to him: 'I am the light of the world' I am the light of the world'. The light went on for the little boy. Confidently he spouted forth: 'My mum is the light of the world'.

For most children that attachment and nurture from their mother is so important. They are a guide and an example. They are the light of the world for the child when they are young. Yet as children grow up other influences come to bear on them and that can cause great angst and stress for parents.

You wonder how to handle situations and be the light for them that guides them into responsible behaviour.

I read a story about a mother who had a sixteen year old daughter. She was going out for the night with friends and she should have been back by 11pm. She rolled in at 1 am. The mother said to her 'you're grounded for a month',. She yells and spits and says she hates her.

The following day, while out shopping, she meets another mother who seems to have perfect children and that mother says 'Oh no I would never do that. This is what you should have said to her: 'You are almost an adult and I am being unreasonable. Could we agree to 12 o'clock next time'. As she leaves the shop the mother is talking to herself 'She's right – I blew it - I should have reasoned with her'.

And at that very moment she meets Cathy who everyone knows has a PHD in motherhood. She shakes her head when she hears the advice suggested by the woman in the shopping queue and whispers in her ear 'The key is in the pocket money. Tell your

daughter that the next time you'll deduct fifty pence for every ten minutes that she's late'. She thanks her profusely and rushes off to try it.

The next week her daughter comes home at 3am, she hands her mother a ten pound note and says 'That should cover it mum!'

The reality is that most solutions have to be changed, adapted, renegotiated and no one knows your kids like you do. But unrealistic expectations and guilt can all rob us of the confidence to parent our kids.

Life is a constant spiritual struggle over what influences us our children our world, good or bad?

MPs voted this week not to follow Australia in banning social media for the under 16s, so children will still be under the influence of algorithms sending them down potential rabbit holes as they browse online on their phones.

Society at the moment sends out different messages about what it means to succeed.

Barack Obama preached at the Revd Jesse Jackson's, the civil rights movement pioneer's funeral the other week and said these words:

We are living in a time when it can be hard to hope. Each day we wake up to some new assault on our democratic institutions, another setback to the idea of the rule of law. An offense to common decency. Every day you wake up to it, to things you just didn't think were possible. Each day, we're told by those in high office to fear each other and to turn on each other — and that some count more than others, and that some don't even count at all. Everywhere we see greed and bigotry being celebrated and bullying and mockery masquerading as strength; we see science and expertise denigrated while ignorance and dishonesty, and cruelty and corruption, are reaping untold rewards. Every single day we see that. And it's hard to hope in those moments.

So it may be tempting to get discouraged, to give in to cynicism. It may be tempting for some to compromise with power and grab what you can, or even for good people, to maybe just put your head down and wait for the storm to pass.

But this man — Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson — inspires us to take the harder path. His voice calls on each of us to be heralds of change, to be messengers of hope; to step forward and say "Send me" wherever we have a chance to make an impact — whether it's in our schools, in our workplaces, in our neighbourhoods and our cities. Not for fame, not for glory, or because success is guaranteed, but because it gives our life purpose, because it aligns with what our faith tells us God demands, and because if we don't step up, no one else will.

When the leader of the free world embodies a doctrine of might is right, there are no laws for the powerful and wealthy, you can bully whoever you want, most mothers would I hope say to their children don't be like that.....

There are so many contradictions in our culture at the moment.

Richard Rohr in his book *The Tears of Things* says we are living in times of utterly conflicted morality:

Killing is wrong but war is good

Greed is wrong but luxury and capitalism are ideals to be sought after

Pride is bad, but nationalism and patriotism are admirable (never in the Bible however)

Lust is wrong but flirting and seduction are attractive

Envy is a capital sin but advertising is our way of life

Anger at our neighbour is wrong but angry people get their own way

Sloth is a sin, but wealthy people can take it easy

Our gospel reading is John 9. Let's look at this passage and see what it says to us in our present crisis.

The context is that Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem during the Jewish Feast of Booths (see John 7), which commemorates Israel's time in the wilderness under Moses after they had escaped from slavery in Egypt. On the festival's opening night, four golden candlesticks were lit in the Temple to symbolize God leading his people through the wilderness by pillars of cloud and fire (Exodus 13.17-22). This ritual informs John's testimony to Jesus in this passage as the light of the world (8.12).

It is appropriate to apply that comparison of walking into a wilderness to our present situation. The Israelites walking in the wilderness were together against the adversities, but they were also at times afraid, quarrelsome and desperate. I know for many people we are entering into a time of anxieties over the war with Iran, your anxieties over money, jobs, businesses, mental health not to mention your concerns about your children. In these difficult times we all need a guiding light – to lead us through the wilderness.

Jesus said in his sermon on the mount that we are the light of the world. Here he says 'I am the light of the world'. God is working through us, through you and through me. Let's shine a light where we can.

The blind man in the gospel story, is not just low in economic status as a beggar, but also stigmatized as a sinner because of his disability (v.2). The man's condition excludes him from Temple worship (Leviticus 21.16-24), and affects his parents, who are

reluctant to identify too closely with him later in the story (vv.2,20-23). The Pharisees are critical, both of the blind man and of Jesus.

In the present situation people will inevitably be asking questions and participating in the blame game. President Trump, always one to spread division and rancor, will blame anyone who disagrees with him. His policies have picked on immigrants. His success is being mimicked in other parts of the world. Divide and rule.

In the gospel story the blind man gets picked on because he has a disability. I have talked with many people who feel picked on because they are in the vulnerable group and see themselves as expendable; or being accused of being irresponsible. The blame game is never good and is corrosive when we need to work together – let's try and continue to spread light not fear and accusation.

The Pharisees ask the deep philosophical, indeed theological question 'is the man born blind because of his sin or his parents' sin?' This was in a time when if something bad happened to you it was assumed that it was your fault somehow. Even today, when suffering comes, people are prone to ask 'what have I done to deserve this?'

I have already had a few people say this is the End of Days, the Apocalypse, Armageddon! God sent plagues to Pharaoh in the time of Moses God is bringing this war so that Jesus can return!

I don't claim to have a hotline to the almighty as others may do – but I can only go on what I know, what has been revealed to us about the nature of God. The Bible says Jesus is the full revelation of the nature of God and in this story, for example, Jesus didn't say anyone was to blame for the man's blindness but that he had come to bring light in the darkness, healing and hope. Jesus sees here an opportunity to do God's work. God is not in the business of punishing people but inspiring us to acts of healing and hope not war and hate.

It is always interesting how people react in a crisis. What they think is the most essential thing to do. What matters most to them. Who do they turn to? During Covid we bought up all the toilet rolls! Now we are buying up petrol.

This is Mothering Sunday and I'm sure many of us need our families around us. The blind man in this passage was disowned by his family. We may be appalled by the parents' lack of support for their son. The Pharisees say this is your son, how can he now see. They say ask him! Don't ask us about him..

On Mothering Sunday, we bring to God all our flawed family relationships to be healed in the warm light of Christ's love. We can only pray that God may show us what it means to honour our mother and father even when they have let us down. We pray for any parents struggling with their children's life choices. We pray for families divided by regret.

But Jesus says in this passage he is our light. He promises to be there for us, for each one of us. He can guide us out of the darkness.

The blind man in this story is so thank full for his encounter with Jesus and the literal touch Jesus has had on his life. Jesus returns to find a man whose faith has grown so much in the face of adversity that he is able to make a confession of faith: 'Lord I believe' he says (verse 38). As such, he is an example in John's Gospel of the courageous faith the first Christians need in their struggles with adversaries.

'Seeing is believing' or so they say! In the Bible passage from John's Gospel, the Pharisees see that a man who was physically blind receives his sight, and yet they refuse to believe that Jesus is who he claims to be. Seeing isn't always believing.

The song *Amazing grace* was written by former slave trader John Newton. Newton had a terrifying near-death experience during a storm and he prayed for God's mercy. After he survived, he went on to become a Christian and ultimately an Anglican priest. The first verse of *Amazing grace* says:

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.

Newton recognised the evil he had done and calls himself a 'wretch'. He sees how God's grace took him from being lost to being found, from being blind to seeing. This blindness is a spiritual blindness to God, but also a moral blindness to the evils of the slave trade. Newton started to lose his physical sight during his later years and so the song perhaps takes on another level of meaning: while his physical sight may have deteriorated, Newton saw things far more clearly. He knew the truth of God's mercy, grace and love and how it can transform lives.

This is something that the Pharisees seem to miss when the blind man is healed. They get caught up with the legalities of how he was healed, when he was healed, etc... but don't stop to celebrate the amazing mercy, grace and love that has been demonstrated. They don't 'see'; rather, they choose not to see the wonder and joy in what has happened.

Sometimes, we all fail to notice, understand, or accept things. Perhaps this is because we are just too busy with our own priorities? Maybe we just don't want to notice? Maybe

it seems too good to be true? Or maybe we have been let down before? Believing involves putting our trust and hope in the thing we believe in, which can be hard, especially when it means we might have to make big changes in our lives just like John Newton did after his conversion.

You might like to invite God to help you 'see' things from God's perspective of mercy, grace and love.

Is the light of Christ in your life? Helping you to see: to see God, to see hope, to see new life.