**JOHN 9 SEEING CLEARLY 28th July 2024**

Intro re series in John.

Today John 9… But instead of a normal sermon will be giving a first person narrative…

I am praying that through entering into this man’s story,

we may see ourselves and more importantly see Jesus more clearly.

And as a result that the light of Christ may shine into any areas of darkness we are currently experiencing

And we may look to him for life, for hope, for healing and restoration.

**PRAYER**

I’m just so confused…

It’s been the best, and the worst day of my life.

 What I thought was up is down and what I thought was down is up….

I am just so confused!...

The day started like any other…

Every day the same just as it had been for…

well I couldn’t tell you how many years…

Ever since my parents put me on the street corner to beg…

probably 20 years ago now.

And every day, every single day since then, come rain, hail or shine…

there I sat. I had too. If I didn’t I wouldn’t eat!

You have no idea what it is like to sit, at the mercy of passing strangers…

Demoralizing, dehumanising, degrading!

Sure, some are kind, and throw a few coins.

Some are remarkably caring…

They pause, plonk themselves down nearby

and offer a few words of encouragement… and some coin…

But most – they just ignore me.

And then there are those who kick me, shove me, snarl at me

and complain I am in the way, a nuisance, a disgrace…

bringing dishonour to the community!

But that’s not the worst of it.

What I hate most is that I can’t participate in normal society.

I have no friends to hang out with, I can’t enjoy walks in the wilderness,

or wandering the markets – I mean, what’s the point!

I bump into things, stumbling around, with people yelling at me to get out the way, or go home, or crueller still…

and I can’t see anything anyway!

But worse than all this - is that – I am excluded from the temple.

From the worship of our God.

Being blind I am not allowed in!

I don’t really understand this – it isn’t my fault I am like this.

I didn’t do anything wrong to become blind!

At least I don’t think so!

The other thing I find really hard is that occasionally I hear people mumbling, talking about me as they walk past.

“Do you think it was something he did,

or perhaps his parents were the sinners?”

I wonder what it was - Blasphemy? Idolatry? Dishonouring his parents?

It must have been something really bad to end up like that!

Talking about me as if I am not there, can’t hear, don’t count for anything!

And I don’t get it…

why do people always want to blame me for being this way.

How could it be me – I have been blind since birth!

And then there’s my parents.

Well! They are a whole other story.

So much so there are times I do wonder if my blindness IS punishment for something they did.

But… well that doesn’t seem fair!

But I do wonder, particularly when I am feeling really low…

It doesn’t help that they sent me out to beg from the time I could walk

And by the time I was 10…

well they didn’t really want anything to do with me anymore!

So here I sit. What else can I do. It’s what I have always done.

It’s what I will always be doing…

at least that was what I thought!

The day started like any other

Getting up before dawn to find the pick of the spots

Then, after the morning rush,

just as things were beginning to quieten down…

giving me a chance to stretch my legs, relax a little…

I could hear another group approach.

So far my pickings had been few, so…

sitting up straight and putting on my most pleasant smile…

(one with a mixture of hope, enthusiasm, humility and gratitude…

facial expressions I had quickly discovered were important…)

I held out my hands …

Hoping for enough to get me some bread

or something for a late breakfast!

Anything to help me get through the day.

But, as so often before, my hope was dashed…

like so many others - they were not interested in me

I was just another object lesson for their discussion

An opportunity to ponder the mysteries of life… at my expense…

*“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” v.2*

In disappointment and disgust…

Just as I was preparing to settle down once more…

When my world was turned upside down!

Suddenly, out of nowhere,

I felt a hand on my shoulder, a firm, gentle loving hand.

And almost without a sound, not even a word,

I felt this cool paste gently being smeared on to my eyes.

“What’s happening, whose doing this, how dare he…

but hang on – this is clearly the act of compassion, care, love.”

You can’t begin to imagine the bewilderment…

the thoughts and feelings now coursing through my body…

And then he spoke.

A firm, but kind voice

A voice of love, of wisdom, of authority…

“Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” he said.

So I did, almost robotically, I simply stood up…

puzzled and uncertain…

Hopeful, but too fearful to believe…

 “I went, washed…. And… can you believe it… I could see”

How do you respond when something like this happens?

Stupid question I know – because things like this don’t happen.

You have no idea how to react.

Nor do you know how others will respond either.

But what I didn’t expect, was how they did respond!

I could never have anticipated what happened next.

If it wasn’t so tragic, so pitiful, so devastating – you’d have to laugh.

Instead of being amazed.

Rejoicing, celebrating, slapping me on the back

and congratulating me on this astonishing miracle,

this incredible intervention by God – after all what else could it be!

Instead of doing any of that – almost everyone I met – doubted!

In fact they even argued about whether I was the same person

they had seen for years begging.

Unbelievable!

And when they asked what had happened and I told them!

I told them that this man called Jesus had simply put paste on my eyes

and then to go and wash at Siloam…

Well they didn’t know what to do!

I expected them to be astonished, surprized,

perhaps even flabbergasted… I guess!

But I also thought they would give thanks to God, Rejoice…

perhaps even to join me in seeking out this man who had made me see…

Instead, they marched me off to the respected leaders of our community

The Ones who knew God’s Word – who understood God’s ways

These were the ones we trusted to show us the way…

The people who could see clearly what God wanted...

Well at least they would be able to see it!

They would give glory to God!

Surely they would join me in giving thanks to God for this miracle!?

But… That was when things got a whole lot more confusing,

so much worse…

Here I was a man they had seen so many thousands of times before…

Here I was, now standing before them

No longer begging, no longer blind,

no longer a burden and disgrace on society

or a threat to their religion…

I could now see… so I came expecting a celebration along with insight, explanation, an affirmation that I had indeed experienced a miracle,

been a recipient of God’s grace…

Instead – what I felt was hostility, anger, even disgust.

It was as if somehow my healing was more shameful than my blindness.

The fact that I could now see…

it felt like they felt it made them look stupid…

In particular they seemed to hate that something like this could happen…

on the Sabbath – God’s day!

It made sense to me…

I mean, when else is a better time for something like this…

but they couldn’t see it!

Couldn’t begin to think this was possible.

And so they quizzed me – interrogated me was how it felt!

“Who did this, when did this happen, how did it happen…

Over and over again.

Occasionally adding – “clearly this can’t be from God.

“God doesn’t do things like this on the Sabbath

“And he certainly doesn’t listen to people who do! Sinners.

People like you! Or the person who did this to you!

I was so confused…

can’t they see that because I can now see it must be God!?

Eventually, they decided more proof was needed.

Despite being able to see – was clear to all, in plain sight for all….

They were blind to what had happened,

could not and would not believe it was God!

So they dragged in my parents: “Is this your son? Is this the one who you say was born blind? How is it then he can now see?”

And like so many times before…

they shrugged their shoulders and washed their hands of me.

They weren’t going to risk participation in community on my account

There was no way they were going to upset these leaders.

Or ruin their reputation

So, wanting to get out as quickly as possible, simple responded:

“Why are you asking us?

He is standing before you, you can see he can answer for himself.

Just ask Him. And they left.

You know it’s one thing to be picked on and disbelieved by your neighbours, peers…

It’s worse still when those in authority treat you as a threat…

doubt and interrogate you…

Its quite another thing altogether when your own family can’t celebrate with you…

In fact they use it as just another excuse to disown you, discard you!

So now I was alone again.

Standing in the synagogue – being judged,

No friends or family to stand by me, support me.

On this what should have been the greatest day of my life.

When my years of anguish and torment were over

No longer defined by my blindness.

I didn’t know whether to crawl up into a ball and cry…

Shrivel up and die…

Or lash out in anger, disappointment and disgust at these… these…

These frauds, these phoneys, these religious charlatans!

These people who claimed to know God’s word,

to speak on behalf of God, to shine God’s light for our lives…

When they so obviously were completely and absolutely blind

to something God does.

Here I was a man born blind – now able to see.

And there they were – people who claimed to see clearly…

but completely blind to what God was doing!

Unbelievable!

So… Taking a deep breath...

I stood up straight and tall.

I looked them directly in the eye

And, speaking slowly, carefully, deliberately, I said:

“I am dumstruck.

Here you are arguing over the man who caused me to see!

You even claim he is a sinner because he healed me on the wrong day…

according to you!

And yet I stand before you a living testimony

that he was used by God to heal me.

I am proof that God listens to Him.

Can’t you see even this!

Well, that did it. They could bare it no longer

And the next thing I knew I was out on the street.

Alone! Again!

So how do you make sense of a day like this!

As I said the best and worst day of my life

A day when my life was turned upside down…!

**I can now see!**

But it was a day when instead of being brought back into society,

allowed for the first time to participate in worship…

Instead I was disgraced, thrown out, discarded once more! PAUSE

I don’t know how long I sat there

trying to make sense of all that had happened

Trying to work out what to do next…

I could no longer beg

I didn’t have a job – or for that matter, even a skill to get a job…

And so I sat.

Grateful – but fearful, Rejoicing - but fearful. Hopeful - but confused!.,

I sat and I sat and I sat, until, I don’t know how long it had been,

I felt this shadow pass over me

Someone drew near…

I looked up.

And there, standing before me was this man…

who, when he spoke “my heart skipped a beat”

He was clearly the same man who had healed me

It must be Jesus.

Jesus had come to see me.

Jesus had sought me out and found me!

”Do you believe in the Son of man” he said

By now my mind was reeling.

My heart racing

With all that had happened so far – I was teetering on the edge…

And now here he is! And he is asking me… What!?

“Do you believe in the **Son of Man**”…

I don’t understand? What does he mean?

This man who has changed my life. Given me sight

And yet he wants me to tell him what I think about the one who was

to come and judge

 God’s representative ruler who will bring judgement and set things right

I didn’t quite get it, I didn’t understand or was not yet able to see…

And yet everything within me cried out…

My heart was not just “Strangely warmed”…

but inextricably drawn, longing, thirsting, crying out… to this man…

to who he was, what he was on about,

Whatever it was – I wanted it. I had to have it.

He was my only hope. My future. My deepest longing.

And so blurted out “Who is he, tell me so that I may believe!”

And that’s when I knew…

That’s when I really saw… understood…

Life is about meeting, knowing and being transformed by this man Jesus!

In fact I would now say…

It’s when I met and responded to Jesus

that my eyes were really opened. I could actually see!

So was I blind because of my sin?

Was it my parent’s sin – their many sins – that caused me to be blind?

And what about the Sabbath?

What is it right to do on this holy day?

Can you work, play or heal on the sabbath?

There are so many questions

So many things I would like to know

I just wish I understood better, could see more clearly…

I wish I could be more sure like all those heavyweights around

It would be so nice to be right, and know it!

And yet, in meeting Jesus I discovered, none of these things really matter?

While doing what God wants is important,

Afterall - it’s what He wants to do – all the time…

What really counts – what helps you see is meeting Jesus.

In Jesus there is a freedom, a joy, a lightness of spirit

and big hearted generosity…

It as if he is alive. Fully alive.

And when you meet him, get to know Him – you come alive to!

It’s as if you get to see for the very first time!

And let me tell you – I know what I am talking about when I say that!

READ: *Joh 9:1-7  As he passed by, he (that is Jesus) saw a man blind from birth.  (2)  And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”  (3)  Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed 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)  Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud  (7)  and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing…*

*Joh 9:35-41  Jesus heard that they (the pharisees) had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”  (36)  He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”  (37)  Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”  (38)  He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.  (39)  Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”  (40)  Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?”  (41)  Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.*

PRAYER

Some of us know what it is like to be on the margins…

Cast aside, overlooked

Rejected, despised, ridiculed, forgotten…

But Jesus – so do you.

Some of us also know what it is to be blind.

Not physically blind – but blind to the reality of who you are

And what you offer.

Thank you Jesus that you have come to make the blind see…

And today you offer this gift to us.

In fact true seeing happens when we see you

and see the world through your eyes…