

2020 Vision
26 March 2017
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Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

http://www.stlukesinthecity.org.nz/sermons_pid_22.html



How's your vision this morning? A bit early in the day to tell? I've certainly noticed the need for more lights and car-lights in the darker mornings lately. Sometimes I need to reduce the font size of the print in your hymnsheet to fit everything in, and I hope that I won't be the cause of you rushing off to the optician for new glasses!

By some fluke of luck, I was able to pass my Plunket eyesight test at the age of 4 with flying colours, but just a few weeks after starting school, it was found I couldn't see the blackboard at all and so at 5, I acquired my first pair of glasses. I've had contact lenses for nearly 40 years now and am officially partially sighted - hence I'm quite likely not to recognise you in the street or in your car, so please don't be offended if I ignore you or call you the wrong name!

But I think even I took my vision for granted, until a few years ago when I suffered a macular haemorrhage and was introduced to the somewhat scary procedure of eye injections, helped considerably by my Dad telling me he'd had about 27 of them and was still going strong! I appreciated even more the skills and talents of eye specialists and nurses, the power of prayer, and the support of friends.

I perhaps look with new eyes, then, on the wonderfully told story we heard this morning from John's Gospel. We are privileged in this Lent season to hear these beautifully crafted dialogue stories of John's Gospel: Jesus' night-time conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus' high-noon encounter with the Samaritan woman, and today a series of vigorous discussions following Jesus' healing of the man who was blind - how I wish we knew his name, although as so often in John, he becomes a representative figure for all who journey from darkness to light in Christ. It's interesting that only at the end of the story do Jesus and the healed man have a real conversation. Before that we have a series of quick-fire exchanges as the poor man has to defend himself before the neighbours, the Pharisees, the Jews ...all of whom seem far more interested in the whys and wherefores of whether Jesus *should* have healed him on the

sabbath, of whether Jesus is a sinner, and whether the man is a sinner, than in actually rejoicing that the man has received his sight.

But notice the journey the man himself is on. He starts off as the *object* of a theological discussion among Jesus' disciples - who has sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus is quick to counter any connections between disability and sin or blame, and moves from questions of past *cause* to the bigger issue of what may happen for him in the future: 'so that God's works might be revealed in him.' (John 9:3)

And then Jesus goes on to *reveal the works of God*, but in a way that shows his concern for that man as an individual. Jesus really sees him, not just him as a topic of conversation. Jesus reaches out and connects with him in a way he can feel, he *touches* him as he puts mud and his own saliva on his eyes, and sends him off to wash in the pool of Siloam.

Jesus then disappears out of the picture and the man, now sighted, barely has time to enjoy this new world in front of him before he has to cope with a barrage of questions from neighbours and then the Pharisees. They are hung up on whether Jesus has contravened the sabbath laws by healing or working on the sabbath, they see Jesus as a sinner.

What does the man himself say of Jesus? Like the Samaritan woman, he recognises that Jesus is a **prophet** (John 9:17), someone who is a channel for the words and work of God.

The Jews come back for another round with the man, trying to tie him up in knots over whether Jesus is a sinner. But the man doggedly sticks to his guns, and we find that he has gained not only sight, but spiritual insight: "We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he *does* listen to one who worships him and obeys his will...if this man were not **from God**, he could do nothing." (John 9:31-33)

For this answer he is driven out (v.34). It's thought that John's gospel was written late in the first century CE, at the time some scholars think is when the Christian community of which John was a part was finding itself gradually separating off from the Jewish synagogues, either 'driven out' as the man seems to be here, or finding that their beliefs and lifestyle were no longer compatible. Perhaps we have a hint of that in this story, as the man finds that becoming a follower, a disciple of Jesus means he no longer fits within his previous community, who perhaps had him conveniently pigeon-holed, and couldn't cope with this new person before them, seeing so clearly not only physically but with insight as well.

But then just at the point when the man was probably wondering if it had been worth all the aggro, Jesus comes and finds him.

Then follows the most extraordinary exchange as Jesus reveals himself to the man as the Son of Man, the Messiah, just as he had to the Samaritan woman.

"Do you *believe* in the Son of Man?"

"And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may *believe* in him."

"You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he."

"Lord, I *believe*" and he *worshipped* him. (John 9:35-38)

In each of these cameos from John's gospel over recent weeks, we have seen the journey of faith that each character is on, and the amazing steps of faith they take as they come to see Jesus first as just another human being, then as a prophet, then as the Son of Man, the Messiah.

And they come to *believe* - one of the key words of John's gospel, indeed the whole purpose of his Gospel: 'that you may come to *believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through *believing*, you may have *life* in his name'. (John 20:31)

Each of these stories shows the main character coming to faith and new life in Jesus. Jesus offers this man both new sight and new insight into who Jesus is. Part of this new world he has entered into is becoming part of a new community, a community described in Paul's letter to the Ephesians as the children of light.

How is our vision of being children of light, of being those called to bear fruit of the light: all that is good and right and true (Eph 4:9)? Christ will shine on us and then we are called to share the light of Christ with others.

Today we gather and give thanks to God for all God's gifts to us, including the fruits of Harvest at this time of year. But we also give thanks for the rich harvest we have here in God's people, who so generously share their time, talents and treasure in God's service here and in our community.

We talk about having 2020 vision, don't we, and amazingly enough, it's now only 3 years till the year 2020! May we pray today for our St Luke's community, for sight and insight, for vision and spiritual vision, for faith and hope as we journey into God's future together, seeking to bear the Christ-light with us as we go. Amen.