

Reflective Worship 2nd Oct 22

The “man born blind”

John 9

“One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see...” (John 9:25)

It’s a strange thing that because I couldn’t see them, they couldn’t really see me either. Almost without exception, everyone assumed that I was in some sort of bubble which made them not just invisible, but also inaudible. Carried on as if I wasn’t really there; just some sort of semi-animated body not capable of interaction, thought or feeling.

And like so many things, because I’d never known any different, that was my “normal”. My place was by the roadside of life, just existing, as others passed by, moved on, experienced things, lived their lives.

His disciples were no different. What a strange crew they were. Of course, later I got to know them better, but they were still an odd, motley bunch. Mixed motives, jostling for attention, often completely out of their depth. Getting it wrong more often than not - and yet still doggedly following Jesus. Well, aren’t we all?

Anyway, that day they were at their splendid, disarrayed, best. They were on a bit of a high – Jesus had just been in the Temple, tying the religious leaders in theological knots – and the disciples were trying to ask intelligent and incisive questions to show that they were keeping up. And as I say, they made the common error of assuming that because I couldn’t see them then I wasn’t really present.

“Who sinned?” they asked.

There it was again. The assumption that someone must be to blame. I believed it myself. I waited to see what lofty answer would be given this time.

But what happened was totally unexpected. When you can’t see, not only do your other senses become heightened, but also things like the sense of space and distance. I was aware that he was moving towards me, but whilst normally I would have been afraid that I would be stepped on or fallen over, I felt seen and completely safe. And then he crouched down in front of me – I could feel his warmth, smell the dust on his clothes, hear the inclusion in his voice as he replied to them, but spoke also to me. To me. With love and compassion.

And *what* he said.... Well, it could only mean that God – Almighty God – knew me and that I mattered to him. Even without my sight I knew that Jesus had seen me in a way that I had never been seen before.

So, then there was the business with the spit and the earth and the daubing of the mud on my eyes – and the option of whether or not I wanted to take the risk of getting to Siloam and finding out what would happen. After all – he could have been a charlatan, setting me

up for fun, to show off to his followers. But he hadn't been like that. I really felt I could trust him. So I went, and washed, and all was exactly as he had said.

For the first time in my life, I could see something.

I went back to my usual place, hoping to see Jesus, to say thank you. To find out more. But he wasn't there. Now here's a strange thing – now I could see. But I seemed to have become even more invisible to those who knew me. It was like they couldn't take on board what had happened. Some even decided that it couldn't be me. They knew me as “the blind beggar” and now I was no longer blind, they just could not readjust their thinking. They'd known me as “a hopeless case” for so long, that there was no space for them to see the real me behind the label.

So different from Jesus.

I was beginning to wonder more about this mysterious rabbi.

And then, of course, the religious leaders turned up, with their rules and regulations, their tutting and their judging, their ins and their outs. I didn't need to ask who they were - they looked exactly as I would have expected them to look.

They'd never even noticed me before, but now suddenly, I am the centre of attention.

“What happened?” they demand.

I tell them.

They ignore me again and talk among themselves – as if I can't hear them. And all the time, my sight is improving – and not just my physical sight, something deeper. Something about hearts and minds and motives is becoming clearer. They are clearly rattled by what has happened. What *is* happening. They debate. Can't reach a conclusion. Can't agree.

I'm in the spotlight again. They ask me what I think

I weigh up all the things I have heard them say. How did what they were saying line up with what I had experienced of this Jesus? Could I hear any truth in what they were saying?

I tell them

“He is a prophet”

Suddenly they have found something they can agree on. I must be wrong.

I must not know whether or not I was blind.

Now – I ask you. Is this rational? Does this have a ring of desperation about it? Is this actually the sound of reality crashing up against their carefully constructed view of the way things *should* be? I was the one who had been blind. Yet they were obviously not seeing clearly.

Anyway, they sent for my parents. Who were terrified, and said whatever they needed to say to get them off their backs. I can't say that I blamed them.

And in a way I was quite pleased to get back into the debate. Because the more questions they asked me – the more they tried to prove their points - to me, themselves, anyone who was listening – the more they helped me to clarify what I thought about Jesus

Was he a sinner? Estranged from God?

Hardly! There was warmth and compassion and freedom to choose. Light. Literally and metaphorically. Yes, I could now physically see; but more than that, I could see where the goodness and love of the Almighty God was present.

And where it was absent.

“One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see...”

And where did he come from?

Everything I had heard, seen and experienced of Jesus pointed in the same way – towards God. If he was not from God, he could do nothing.

I told them so.

They threw me out.

Out of their sight. Out of membership of the synagogue. Out of God's chosen people.

They cut me off from God.

At least – they cut me off from *their idea* of God.

For Jesus came and found me.

Let me say that again – “Jesus came and found me”.

Me.

Not the pitiable beggar at the side of the road, little more than rubbish.

Not “the man born blind”

But me.

He asked if I believed that he was the one sent by God to restore all things. And I looked and I saw. With my physical eyes – the man, Jesus. With my spiritual sight, God, there before me in human form.

“Lord, I believe.” And I worshipped him.

And worship him still.

I'm a follower of the Jesus Way now. Peter and the others are really good at standing up and explaining about Jesus being the Messiah. That's not really my thing. But I do know my own story, and tell it to anyone who will listen, because one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see...

Some things you might like to reflect on.....

The blind man was overlooked when he was blind, and not even recognised by some people when he received his sight.

- Do we see people as they are, or as a label?
- Who do we overlook?
- Do we notice when people change, or do we assume they will always stay exactly the same?

The Pharisees were so stuck in their way of seeing things that they just couldn't accept anything which challenged it. And so they missed Jesus.

- How easy is it to change the way we see things?

In the re-telling of the story, the Pharisee's questions actually helped the man to see who Jesus is.

- What or who has helped/is helping you to see who Jesus is? (*Or if you're not sure, what or who do you think might help?*)
- Who might you be able to help, maybe by telling your story?