

**The Lectionary reading for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent; John Chapter 9**

This is a long and fascinating reading about the healing of a blind man and the aftermath. It lends itself to a dramatic, and at times amusing, “script.” **A SUMMARY:**

Jesus and disciples see a man blind from birth

**Disciples;** “Rabbi, who sinned- this man or his parents that he was born blind?”

**Jesus;** “Neither- but it happened so that God’s work might be displayed in him”.... “I am the light of the world”

Jesus spat on the ground; made mud out of saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes.

**Jesus;** “Go.... wash in the Pool”

He went, washed, and came home seeing.

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**Those who had formerly seen him begging asked;**

“Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?”

**Some said** “Yes”

**Others;** “No- he only looks like him”

**But he said** “I am the man”

**Crowd:** “How then were your eyes opened?”

**Man;** “The man called Jesus put some mud on my eyes .... told me to go and wash.... so I did, now I can see”

**Crowd:** “Where is this man?”

**Man;** “I don’t know”

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## **THE PHARISEES INVESTIGATE!**

They brought the man to the Pharisees.

The healing had taken place on the Sabbath.

**Pharisees;**“How did you receive your sight?”

The man told them.

**Some Pharisees said;** “This Jesus is not from God for he does not keep the Sabbath”

**Others asked;** “But how can a sinner perform such signs?”

They were divided. They turned to the man.

**Pharisees;** “What have you to say about him? After all, it was your eyes he opened”

**Man;** “He is a prophet”

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The Pharisees still did not believe, so they sent for the man’s parents.

**Pharisees;** “Is this your son?”

**Parents:** “Yes”

**Pharisees;** “Is this the one who was born blind?”

**Parents:** “Yes”

**Pharisees:** “So- How come he can now see?”

**Parents:** “We know he is our son- we know he was born blind,

- but how he can now see, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know.

- Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself”.

(His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who had already decided that anyone who acknowledged Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the Synagogue).

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A second time, the **Pharisees** called the man who had been blind. “Tell the truth- we know this man is a sinner”

**Man:** “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know- I was blind and now I can see!

**Pharisees:** “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

**Man:** “I’ve told you already and you don’t listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”

The **Pharisees** hurled insults at him:

“You are this fellow’s disciple!

WE are disciples of Moses,

but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”

**Man;** “Now that is remarkable!

You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.

If this man were **not** from God, he could do nothing.”

**Pharisees;** “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!”

And they threw him out

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Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went to find the man.

**Jesus:** “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

**Man:** “Who’s he? Tell me so I may believe in him”

**Jesus;** “You have now seen him; in fact he is the one speaking with you”

**Man;** “Lord, I believe”

And he worshipped him

**Jesus;** “I am come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind”

Some **Pharisees** who heard this said “What? Are we blind too?”

**Jesus;** “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now you claim you can see, your guilt remains”

## Intro

There’s a lot in this story/ account.

Going to concentrate on one set of players – the Pharisees- the church representatives

In Alice through the Looking Glass, the White Queen tells Alice that she used to believe “6 impossible things before breakfast”

Critics of Christianity sometimes accuse us of suggesting that we should believe the impossible too.

Certainly, the Pharisees were reluctant to believe what to them seemed impossible.

- That a man born blind, was made to see by Jesus

“You can’t believe that”, they said, “It’s impossible”

VICTOR MELDREW in the series, “One foot in the grave,” had a famous catchphrase

“I don’t believe it”

## 1. The Pharisees would not believe that the man has received his sight by God's miracle

The Pharisees would not believe that the man has received his sight by God's miracle



“They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight”

*(John Chapter 9 verse 18)*

Either, he was cheating before (not really blind); he is cheating now (pretending he can see); OR there were dubious powers at work involving this bloke, Jesus.

As a Church today (the people) - we believe that God is STILL doing miraculous things amongst us.

A church friend of ours was recently given hours to live. As fellow church members... we prayed... and we prayed... and we prayed. She is now home and doing OK.

Of course, there are others we have similarly prayed for, who have died. It could have just been a coincidence, but a number of people at our church believe her recovery was an answer to

prayer- unbelievable as it may sound. That God is still at work today doing unbelievable things.

I am in touch with a small **village church in Lincolnshire**. It is an old building and had falling numbers, and was almost written off. Yet a few years ago, the people had a vision and believed that God was urging them towards a new start. They had to let some of their old, loved, traditions go, and trust God to lead them in new directions.

I recently went to their church anniversary. And, you know what? The church has come alive again; many new people have come and joined- the worship is lively, and it is a focus for community action again in that village. A few years ago, that would have been unbelievable.

I'm not going to get carried away.... sometimes it is hard!

As we live through the effects of the coronavirus outbreak, we know just how hard life is, and how irritating glib "just believe" statements can be.

- We are shocked and hurting, and nothing can take that away.
- We stand alongside those who are suffering, worried and grieving, not really knowing how to make sense of what is happening.

BUT, as Christians we need to believe that God is still at work in the world, and we have not been pushed aside or forgotten.

Even in today's difficult times, the seemingly impossible can become possible.

The Pharisees – the church leaders of the day- had lost their faith to believe that what seems impossible is actually possible with God.

God really has got the “whole world in his hands,” and invites us to share in bringing about his kingdom on earth- even this week and this month.

## **2. The Pharisees couldn't see beyond their “rules”**

The Pharisees couldn't see beyond  
their 'rules'



“This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath”

*(John Chapter 9 verse 16)*

A “Sabbath” healing- this Jesus can’t be any good if he heals someone on the Sabbath

- Doesn’t he know the rules?

It is a fascinating dialogue between the Pharisees and the man

- “this man is not from God- he doesn’t keep the Sabbath” said the Pharisees

The Man replies, simply

“I don’t know if he kept your rules or not- **all I know is I was blind and now I can see**”

The man is denigrated by the very people who should have rejoiced that that this sign had taken place within their midst.

AS A CHURCH

- We DO have biblical guidelines to follow
- We DO have doctrines and ways of operating that have been prayerfully developed over a long period of time

BUT- we need to examine our “rules” to make sure that they are truly from God.

Last year, I attended a church service where Boys Brigade Awards were being presented. I felt distinctly under- dressed compared to these young men- and young women- who paraded in to receive their awards for various tasks completed

in the preceding year. The usual church congregation was tripled by the presence of proud parents, grandparents and friends who came to support them. It was a joyous occasion with many different styles of worship.

As I left the church, one of the fathers came up to me and said “I didn’t know church could be like that.... I’d like to come again.”

BUT felt he couldn’t. After all, he said,

- “I like a drink
- I go to the pub 2 or 3 nights a week
- So, I wouldn’t be welcome in a church like this, would I?”

I remember- and respect- very strict rules about drink and the Methodist Church. Indeed, many of my Dad’s generation ‘signed a temperance pledge,’ as part of being a member of the Methodist Church.

It was right that people spoke out, and still speak out, about the ways in which drink can destroy lives and families.

BUT- **how** we apply our rules is important.

When I was working for a national homelessness charity, we had contacts and meetings with another charity, based in Manchester. This charity was providing services to young gay people. We were looking at ways our 2 charities could work together.

I got on very well with the guy in charge of the charity in Manchester. After one Friday meeting, we were talking informally about our respective plans for the weekend. I mentioned that I would be attending an event at our church. Horrified, he said, “You’re not a Christian are you? So, you’ll have no time for the people we are working with.”

When did our rules make people feel they are unworthy?

The exact opposite of Jesus’ message!

We need to constantly examine- and re examine- our “rules” to make sure that they are truly from God.

### **3. The Pharisees are accused of being wilfully blind**

The Pharisees are accused of being  
“wilfully blind”



“What? Are we blind too?”

Jesus said..... “Your guilt remains”

*(John Chapter 9 verses 40 & 41)*

They didn't just make a mistake- they purposefully refused to see.

There is an old saying that "there are none so blind as those who will not see."

Jesus effectively says to the Pharisees, the church leaders of the day, "You say you're looking for the coming Messiah- but you refuse to see the evidence when it is right in front of you;

- The blind see
- The lame walk
- People are set free.

AND YOU JUST REFUSE TO SEE IT.

No amount of evidence will convince you.

Yours is the worst kind of blindness.

- A wilful blindness
- And as church leaders, your guilt is great!
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(Conclusion)

This is not meant to be a naive or sugary sermon!! Our reality is that;

- LIFE CAN BE TOUGH
- AWFUL THINGS DO HAPPEN

- OFTEN WE DONT SEE THE ANSWERS TO PRAYER THAT WE WANT TO, NO MATTER HOW HARD WE TRY

In the 1970s, an important book was called “The Road Less Travelled” by W. Scott Peck.

The first paragraph of the book has just 3 words;

“Life is difficult.”

Once we have accepted that, we can move on positively to address all life’s opportunities and challenges, but let’s not kid ourselves and others, because

- Life is difficult,
- Yet , as Christians, we do not give up

THE EVIDENCE IS THERE THAT GOD IS AT WORK IN OUR LIVES AND IN OUR WORLD

Unlike the Pharisees;

- We need to keep looking for the signs of God at work in our lives, and in our world.
- Because the evidence is there.
- We need to see it and believe it.
- Not letting our ‘man- made’ rules get in the way of seeing God at work.
- Not being wilfully blind to what is going on.

The current coronavirus outbreak is horrible.

NOTHING can take away the pain/ the hurt/ the shock of what is happening.

YET

God is still at work in our world

He has not given up on us

He calls on us now to KEEP ON- working for the kingdom right here/ right now/ especially at times like this.