



St Philip's Come & See

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Sunday 22 March 2020

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Sentence

'I am the light of the world,' says the Lord; 'those who follow me will have the light of life.' John 8.12

Prayer of the day

Gracious God, in order that we children of earth might discern good from evil you sent your Son to be the light of the world: as the light of Christ shines upon us, may we learn what pleases you, and live in truth and goodness; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Today's Readings

1 Samuel 16.1-13.

16The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.' 2Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.' And the Lord said, 'Take a heifer with you, and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord." 3Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.' 4Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, 'Do you come peaceably?' 5He said, 'Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.' And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord.'

7But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.' 8Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, 'Neither has the Lord chosen this one.' 9Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, 'Neither has the Lord chosen this one.' 10Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, 'The Lord has not chosen any of these.' 11Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are all your sons here?' And he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.' And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.' 12He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.' 13Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd:

therefore can I lack nothing.

2 He will make me lie down in green pastures:

and lead me beside still waters.

3 He will refresh my soul:

and guide me in right pathways for his name's sake.

4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:

for you are with me, your rod and your staff comfort me.

5 You spread a table before me in the face of those who trouble me:

you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.
6 Surely your goodness and loving-kindness will follow me all the days of my life:
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Ephesians 5.8-14

8For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— 9for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,
'Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.'

John 9.1-41

1As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 3Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' 6When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' 9Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' 10But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' 11He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' 12They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.' 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' 16Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. 17So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.' 18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' 20His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' 22His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.' 24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' 25He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' 26They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' 27He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' 28Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' 30The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' 34They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out. 35Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 36He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' 37Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' 38He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. 39Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' 40Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' 41Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.'

Reflection

What an extraordinary story our gospel offers us this morning. It is a narrative of a journey into faith. The blind man encounters Jesus and is, in effect, baptised and made new in the Pool of Siloam, he 'sees' but it is no magical cure, the 'cure' is partial. He sees Jesus, but does not see who he truly is, for him he is 'the man called Jesus.' Controversy ensues, the Pharisees question him and his parents - who are concerned that they will be banned from the Synagogue. Eventually he encounters Jesus again and acknowledges who he truly is - 'Lord, I believe' and he worships him. Many folk are comfortable in acknowledging Jesus as a teacher, a mystic, a healer even, but cannot take the next step, a step of faith. This is often not a short step, it is more likely to be a series of steps over time. It may involve ridicule from others including family. Our role is to come alongside and show that this man Jesus, is in words of Pope Francis, alive and well. Only then will we have the opportunity to help them on this journey of faith.

Our thinking and praying about 'community' is now being tested in the current crisis that besets us all. I read this recently with thanks to Fr. Stephen Freeman, a priest of the Orthodox Church in America, serving as Rector of St. Anne's in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He writes:

Communities are not built by pioneers. They are rooted in mutual need and brokenness. Stanley Hauerwas has observed: My hunch is that you don't just make a community up. You discover that you need one another because you're in danger.

The Church is, first and foremost, a community. It is, indeed, the primary community, the communion of God and humanity in Christ. We often think about it as a community of "faith," imagining that it is our shared beliefs that bind us together. And, of course, having failed at any number of points to keep calm and carry on, our faith wanes, or falters, and we feel isolated and excluded. We fear to speak of the alienation.

A careful study of St. Paul's letters makes it clear that we are saved not by our strength (or even our common faith): we are saved by our weakness. Grace is only truly complete and in its fullness in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Strangely, we fear that our weakness (in its various manifestations) will drive others away. In truth, if others are not with you in your weakness, they are not truly with you. We gladly celebrate our strengths, and place great store by our perceived talents. Those things bring us awards and congratulatory attention. But we do not enter into communion through such things - they do not reside in that faculty of the heart where communion can be found. The communion we have with Christ is, strikingly, through His shed blood and His broken body. In a similar fashion, our capacity for communion lines up most closely with that which is most vulnerable - and hence - always very close to the places of our own wounds.

In this time of need I pray that in sharing our need we will discover what true community is. Amen.

This coming week @ St Philip's

Dear Friends,

With the Lenten season well underway and Holy Week and Easter on the horizon it is difficult to comprehend that we won't be able to gather this year to celebrate these great events that lie at the very heart of our faith. Even in war zones people gather to celebrate the Eucharist, I recall in Afghanistan a rocket attack during the Easter Vigil which left us all laying on the floor of the chapel, we carried on once the all clear had sounded! I found a picture recently of St Peter's Melbourne during the influenza epidemic of 1919. The altar is on the steps at the front door of the church and the congregation are gathered in the courtyard, even this, it seems, is not permissible such is the infectious nature of COVID19.

It is however at times such as these that our faith should come to the fore as we care for those who are isolated. I am already speaking with folk who are clearly frightened by the thought of being shut in. Easter faith is all about seeing things in new ways, of new possibilities from seemingly hopeless situations. We cannot be bound by 'this is what we've always done!' As I write it is early days and we are yet to put together a response to the inevitable pastoral needs that will arise. At this stage other folk will join the Pastoral Care Team and we will be working to ensure that both spiritual and practical care is offered.

In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns or if you hear of initiatives that we can adopt in our community to hold us together. These are extraordinary times that require of us an extraordinary response.

Blessings, Martin

Prayer Points

For those in need: Ben Haseler; Sam Mahony; Hugh Gulliver; Roger Sharp, Ros Dalziell

Those we remember: Jean Parke (17/3/87); Marjorie Wright (19/3/02); Noel Barratt (20/3/99); John Dimmic (22/3/71); Patrick Bannerman (23/3/94); Ethel McInnes (24/3/16); Betty Heaton (24/3/17); Allan Pound (28/3/93); David Linaker (29/3/96)

Pewsheets deadline: Thursday 12noon. Please forward notices and prayer points to pewsheets@stphilipsoconnor.org.au or 0414 309 469

During this time when we are unable to gather please consider giving to St. Philip's using electronic transfer.

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