

PSALM 111 verses 1 - 10

¹Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly.

²Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them.

³Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures for ever.

⁴He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate.

⁵He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant for ever.

⁶He has shown his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations.

⁷The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.

⁸They are established for ever and ever, enacted in faithfulness and uprightness.

⁹He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant for ever – holy and awesome is his name.

¹⁰The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

JOHN chapter 9 verses 1-25

¹ As he [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'

³ 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'

⁶ After saying this, he spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ 'Go,' he told him, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam' (this word means 'Sent'). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. ⁸ His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, 'Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?' ⁹ Some claimed that he was. Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.' But he himself insisted, 'I am the man.'

¹⁰ 'How then were your eyes opened?' they asked.

¹¹ He replied, 'The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.'

¹² 'Where is this man?' they asked him.

'I don't know,' he said.

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. 'He put mud on my eyes,' the man replied, 'and I washed, and now I see.'

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.' But others asked, 'How can a sinner perform such signs?' So they were divided.

¹⁷ Then they turned again to the blind man, 'What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.'

The man replied, 'He is a prophet.'

¹⁸ They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹ 'Is this your son?' they asked. 'Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?'

²⁰ 'We know he is our son,' the parents answered, 'and we know he was born blind. ²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.' ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. 'Give glory to God by telling the truth,' they said. 'We know this man is a sinner.'

²⁵ He replied, 'Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!'

“YOU ARE NEVER ALONE”

4. He gives sight to the blind

READING: *John chapter 9 verses 1 - 25*

Our eyesight is something that we take so much for granted, until the time comes when it starts to cause problems. For children it usually is the first pair of glasses and sadly, the teasing which could come as a result of having to wear them. I recall my first pair of National Health glasses, and the teasing I had to put up with from some of my classmates. Then as life progresses, it might be the first set of contact lenses. For those who have struggled putting them in, and then struggled a bit less so trying to get them out, or losing them as they have inadvertently “popped out”, will know where I am coming from. Then further down the road, if you have not already embarked upon laser eye surgery, then comes the varifocals, complete with a set of reading glasses. Oh the joy of getting used to my first set of varifocals. I looked like a nodding dog trying to get the right position to see clearly. The swapping around of one set of glasses for reading, one set for “normal” use. What a hassle!! But then, for some, comes the time when even the thought of hassle would be welcome. For too many today, the reality of macular degeneration brings the sad reality of not being able to read, to see clearly, if at all. What had been a given once upon a time, is no longer there. I often wonder if it is worse to have and then lose one’s sight, or to have gone through life without sight?

A blind man who could see

In our reading today, Jesus encounters a man sitting by the wayside. This was not a totally unusual sight to see, but what happens here is. The disciples start up a theological discussion related to the connection between sin and suffering. Having seen the miraculous acts which Jesus had already performed, thus far, there was no indication that another miracle was about to happen. In the Jewish faith, as with others in modern times – even within some Christian circles, the suffering in an individual’s life, is often attributed to some wrong they may have done and that this was their punishment. But in **verse 2**, the realisation that this man had been blind since birth, then someone else’s wrong goings must have brought this on him, perhaps his parents.

Sadly, in our society there are those children whose lives are blighted by illness brought on by the actions of a mother when carrying them. We hear heart breaking stories of addict mothers whose babies are born with additions. Of dads who will cause injury to the mother whilst she is carrying a child, and the child is born with some physical problems.

Back to this man. Not a request for healing, but rather a discussion as to whose fault it was. Jesus goes on the next few verses to say that it was no one’s fault, but that this man’s life was about to change. Then comes the original “here’s mud in your eye”! We read that Jesus does the strangest of things. Max Lucado writes “A prayer would have seemed appropriate. Perhaps a “hallelujah! But who expected to hear a guttural clearing of the throat? A heavenly spit in the dirt?” Jesus spits in the mud, makes a paste and rubs it on the man’s eyes. Someone has suggested that what Jesus was doing here might have been a reminiscence of the creation, when Adam was formed out the mud of the ground, and now Jesus was creating seeing eyes for this man. Then Jesus told the man (**verses 7 and 8**) to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam, which the man did and had his sight restored, causing great consternation and amazement amongst his friends and neighbours and a grave problem for the religious authorities.

Sighted people who were blind

Once it became known what had happened, there were those who were amazed. There were those who doubted. There were those who were furious. But the man himself knew what had happened.

Checking through the internet for an exact quote, I was surprised that the one I was looking for seems to have been attributed to a few people, with slight variations. In **Jeremiah chapter 5**

verse 12, it says ***“Hear now this, oh foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears and hear not.”*** English dramatist and poet, John Heywood (1497-1580) wrote: “There are none so blind as those who will not see. The most deluded of people are those who chose to ignore what they already know.” Later, Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), author of “Gulliver’s Travels” amongst many other writings, reiterates this thought in his “Polite Conversation” and it is paraphrased as “There are none so blind as those who will not see”.

We move from a man who was unable to see, but had his eyes opened, to those who thought they could see, but blinded themselves to the truth of what had happened. It did not fit in with what they believed to be right, so it must be wrong. Looking at the fall out from what had happened to man born blind, we begin to see the story is a lot more than just one where Jesus healed a man born blind. We see that there are those who are spiritually blind even though they have 20/20 physical vision. We read of a man who was born blind having his spiritual eyes open but a good portion of this story is about the Pharisees, those religious leaders and experts in the Scripture, whose spiritual eyes are blinded. Here are the Pharisees – separated from the world, devoted to God – yet they were blind as bats to spiritual truth. The origin of the name “Pharisee” has been debated, but most scholars agree that it derives from the Hebrew root meaning “to separate.” This makes sense, because the Pharisees were separatists. One such group of Pharisees were known as the “bruised and bleeding” Pharisees. This was because in the attempt to avoid lust they would walk about with their eyes covered - and as a result fall into holes or walk into walls. Their bruises became their proof of spirituality and commitment to God. The Pharisees were those people who set themselves up as the religious leaders of the people while being separate from them and better than them. What scares me about the Pharisees, with whom Jesus had many a confrontation, is when I look at myself, I see that I’m more like them than I care to admit.

What had happened here smacked in the face of all that they believed to be right. By healing the man, it meant that sins had been forgiven and only God could forgive sins, and that what had happened here was blasphemous. Added to the fact that the healing had taken place on the Sabbath – that Jesus had broken Sabbath rules by working, by spitting in the mud and making the paste, on the Sabbath day added to that blasphemy. The saddest consequences of what had taken place was that the healed man had been thrown out of the religious community for allowing what had happened to happen, and for attesting to the fact of the healing.

Concluding thoughts

The story of this man is our story. Comparing this account to those we have already shared over the past few weeks, John goes to great length to detail the events. John covered the changing of the water into wine in 12 verses; the healing of the man at the Pool of Bethesda in 15 verses; in 14 verses, 5000 men plus women and children were fed; and in 6 verses we read of Jesus walking on the water. But John takes 41 verses to tell of Jesus finding this man, of healing him, and of maturing him. Despite the opposition of the authorities, this man’s testimony on which he stood was “much I do not fully know or understand, but this one thing I do know, once I was blind, now I can see.”

Initially, this man could not see Jesus, but Jesus saw him. There is not one of us who are invisible to Jesus’ sight. None of us so insignificant, or our needs unworthy of his healing and comforting touch. The world around us might pass us by. The circumstances of life might overwhelm us. People might point the finger and accuse us of bringing it all on ourselves. But the Saviour still sees us.

This man was not theologically trained. Perhaps he did not even know who Jesus was, but he knew what had happened to him. His life had changed completely. It was his words of testimony which slave trader turned abolitionist/clergyman/hymnwriter, John Newton, immortalised in one of his most famous hymns when he wrote “I once was lost, but now I’m found, t’was blind but now I see.

This story starts with a blind man, alone and hopeless, yet seen by Jesus. It ends with a “one was-blind” man worshipping Jesus, testifying about what he has personally experienced. Without Christ we are blind to His purposes for our lives, but we are not blind to His ever searching eyes. It is not his will for us to grope blindly through life spiritually speaking. He wants us to know where we are going, what our purpose in life is. We are never alone. Whilst our physical eyes might not function as we would like, may our spiritual eyes see His presence and His power at work in and through our lives.

A man born blind
Hears a commotion
Feels motion before him
He stands before the Light
That shines with blinding brightness
He senses the man's breathing
His heavy overshadowing
Attunes his ear to listen
Like blackbird on the glistening grass
Searching for his food
A rustle of a tunic as He bends
Spitting on the earth
A mixing of a paste within his hands
Once more he feels Him standing close
Cocooned from crowds around him
Hears his breathing
Feels his Spirit surrounding
He has not felt or heard like this before
Or been thus enlightened
But being without sight
His other senses are most heightened
And then a shadow passes across his eyes
As mud paste is applied
Earth and heaven combining
In a wond'rous intertwining
A miraculous anointing
And then He speaks
Not to the crowds that he can sense around
But privately, intimately, where he could feel his
warm and gentle breath
“Go... wash... in the pool of Siloam”
This he did straightway
And returned seeing
(Not a line to throw away !)
Cataclysmic miracle with huge meaning
He now searches for the One who did the healing
But He's not there, or so it seems
He does not know what people look like
Even though now he sees
And is learning gradually by degrees
His only focus is to find the man of God
Instead he hits the brick wall of religion
And faces question after question
Who was the Man ?
And who are you ? What did He say?
What did He do ? Where is He now ?
This imposter
Where did He go ?
You think He's a prophet

How do you know ?
He broke our rules
So you're complicit
You think you're cleverer than us ?
That's it, is it ?
Give glory to God man
Tell the truth
This man is a sinner
And we have proof !
No – one of God
Would heal on our Holy Day
What can you say ?
Be off with you
Get on your way !
And with that they threw him out of the
synagogue
They- the ones who should rejoice with him
Do nothing but blabber on about sin
They, who claim to know and be upholders of the
truth
The self-proclaimed representatives of God on
earth
Who could have danced for joy with a man healed
of blindness from birth
They have shown themselves more blind than he
And in that moment we are told
As he stands there alone
Jesus comes to find him
Wonderfully , gloriously, joyfully
He now could see the form
That just before
He only envisaged in his mind's eye
As Jesus before him
He sensed it was the Healer
The same peace, the same presence
As He came nearer..
The aura that He carried
The same atmosphere
And then He spoke
The voice that calmed the sea and raised the dead
The sound of many waters
The still small voice
“ Do you believe in the Son of Man “ said He
“And who is He, kind Sir , that I might believe?”
And Jesus said “That would be me “
The man fell down to worship Him
“ Lord , I believe “
And so do I
Can you ?
Can you see through to who He really is ?
Son of Man , Son of God, Jesus

John Nuttall, (May 2018)