



Lent 4, Year A – April 3, 2011

John 9. 1-41

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston

"Amazing grace..."

As 21st century readers we miss so much in our reading of the Gospels and no more so than in our reading of the Gospel of John. The imagery, illusions and subtleties in the facts, so clear for early listeners, is all but lost on us from our thousands of miles and 19 centuries away vantage point.

"how sweet the sound..."

Rich and deep, clear and picturesque John's words are like poetry to our ears but the allusions are hard to grasp. This gospel, in the chapters leading up to what we heard today, harken back to the prophet Isaiah's prediction of the coming Messiah. He celebrates and alludes to the Jewish Festival of the Booths that would have been a near but distant memory for his listeners, kind of like saying prayers in the local graveyard on All Hallows Eve is for us; something that we no longer do but remember just the same. The festival of booths is a reminder of God's commandment for the Jews to live in huts made of branches to commemorate the freedom from slavery in Egypt. It is a ceremony of gratitude. Part of the ceremony is to travel up the Jerusalem Pilgrim Road carrying water from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple. "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes and said to me, to the Siloam and wash".

"That saved a wretch like me..."

We miss it, those details that were once clear. They give thanks at the pool of Siloam for the gifts that God has given them. This man, healed from eternal blindness, knows that by washing in the pool of Siloam he is participating in an act of gratitude. Is he a sinner? Yes, as we all are. We are all asked to repent, to turn around when we miss the mark and turn away from God. We are all asked to cleanse ourselves and reconcile with God. He was a sinner, not as demonstrated by his blindness but by the mere fact that he woke in the morning and thought bad thoughts about his neighbour. Try as we might none of us can live as God might hope, which is why we come and repent and ask forgiveness.

"I once was lost"

Today we meet a Pharisee, or more to the point, a group of Pharisees who were so intent on keeping the rules as given by Moses they were too blind to notice the gravity of the miracle that was taking place before them. Once again, like Nicodemus before them, they were so certain of their "right-ness" that they could not see that this man before them, this man called Jesus, was in fact the Messiah that had been foretold by their own prophet, Isaiah. These Pharisees remain belligerent to the end, able to see the sunshine yet not the light.

The blind man's parents were also living in darkness; the darkness of fear. So terrified were they by the thought of being shunned from the Temple they chose to remain silent rather than admit the miracle that they had witnessed in their son.

"But now am found..."

But the blind man, he gets it. He gets it that by being asked to wash in the Pool of Siloam he was offering an act of thanks. The blind man, willing not only to admit that Jesus was indeed the Son of Man but to do so publically, makes him the most devoted of disciples. I'm sure that his parents were grateful too, but because they never said it out loud, I'm not sure that it counts. "Lord, I believe", the healed man says – out loud, declaring it for all to hear.

"was blind"

To be thankful in your hearts, to be silently grateful for the place of Jesus in your life keeps you in that lost place along with the healed man's parents. It is only when we say it out loud, like the healed man did, that we can bring light to others. Jesus, clearly in the Gospel of John, in the Good News of John, was the light of the world, restoring sight and providing a light unto our path we are called to follow.

"but now I see"

We have it, you and I, this light of Christ and we must not keep it to ourselves. When we live in gratitude, deep gratitude, for this Eucharistic meal, for this place and for one another we cannot remain the same. We come to gather and incorporate the body and blood of Christ into ourselves and then we are called to take that light out into the world. We, together, all of us, were lost and have been found, were blind but now we see. And now we are called to go out and, with grateful hearts and uplifting words, use our light to lighten the path of others so that they may share in the light of Christ.

*"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see".*