

I wonder what you thought when you heard today's reading about Jesus healing the blind man in Bethsaida – especially the part where Jesus spat in his eyes? When Mark chose to record this miracle his primary purpose was probably not to give a guide on praying for blind people – and I think most vicars would say, like me, that they have never spat at anyone as part of praying for them. However, there are a couple helpful pointers that this event gives us which I will mention quickly before getting on to the main points of this passage:

1. Jesus was able to heal the man because people brought him to Jesus. It might sound obvious, but the heart of all intercession is bringing people to Jesus. We often don't know what to pray for, and we may not feel we have the words to do justice to the longing of our hearts – but we can still bring the people we love in name to Him. More than that, when friends share their problems with us they should know that we will pray for them – Often we can offer to pray there and then but, if not, promise to pray later (and keep that promise) and perhaps ask permission for them to be prayed for in church.
2. One of the important things that John Wimber (an American preacher who had a big influence on prayer for healing in this country) taught, was the importance of asking people what they felt God was doing in them while they were being prayed for. When Jesus asked the man if he could see – he replied that he could see people but that they were still blurred – like trees walking. So Jesus was able to pray some more. The first time I stopped in the middle of a prayer and asked someone whether they felt anything happen, it felt really odd – I wasn't used to mixing conversation with God with conversation with another person – but sometimes people will talk about heat or sensation in part of their body and that helps focus prayer on what God is doing.

Now, let's turn our attention to what I believe is Mark's reason for including this passage – and I am doing so in three headings:

Jesus the Messiah revealed

Jesus the Messiah hidden!

Jesus the Messiah understood:

Jesus the Messiah revealed

In the previous chapter Mark told us about a man who was deaf and couldn't speak – As with the blind man, Jesus used spit in his healing which left the man able to hear and talk. To the people who experienced that, and to the people of Bethsaida, who witnessed the blind man being healed, these may have just seemed like special events. But to the Disciples and those who were travelling with Jesus the healing of

the dumb and the blind would have been special signs pointing to Jesus being the Messiah – the Christ:

Isaiah wrote:

Isaiah 35: 5&6 *“Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.”*

Then when John the Baptist sent a message from prison to ask Jesus if he was the one they should expect, Jesus replied:

“Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.”

Mark was clear in the way he recorded these events that Jesus was demonstrating that he was the promised Messiah that everyone was waiting for.

Jesus the Messiah hidden!

Here is a question for you to ponder: Why, after both these healings, if they showed that Jesus was the Messiah, did Jesus tell the ones he had healed to keep it secret?

The answer seems to be that Jesus was in a dilemma – he wanted his followers to recognize he was the Messiah – the Christ – but, at the same time, realise that he was not the Messiah they expected. For Jesus, the road to being Messiah led to Jerusalem and the cross – The Messiah everyone expected was a might warrior- and there was real danger that an army might have started coalescing around him. Jesus was far greater than the Messiah people expected, and far greater than the Messiah that people wanted - but, until he died and rose again, nobody was ready to receive him as he was.

If Jesus was limited by not being the Messiah that people expected or wanted – I wonder if the same is true today. Is our perception of Jesus who we want him to be or who he really is? Could it be that the Jesus we are trying to follow is too tame? – Do we want to hear that Jesus turns the world upside down through his followers? Do we want to hear that he doesn't come to help us live settled quiet lives, but disturbs us out of our comfort zone and self-absorption so that we might be His means to disturb the world until His Kingdom is established?

Jesus the Messiah understood:

We use the metaphor of seeing as a way of describing understanding. When someone explains how something works, we might reply; “Oh, I see!”

Mark records two blind men being healed on different occasions— this one and Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46f) These healings act like the bread of a sandwich where the filling consists of Jesus teaching and guiding the disciples into an understanding of who he is and what it means to live in God’s Kingdom – an understanding which will grow but not be fully realized until after the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Just before the healing of blind man, Jesus had performed his second feeding miracle – this time of four thousand. Ironically, with all the bread left over, they had only remembered to bring one loaf into the boat. In the discussion that followed Jesus said to them, “Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears that fail to hear?” Mark puts the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (which happens in stages) straight after this conversation about their intellectual and spiritual blindness, to link it with the way that the disciples spiritual blindness will be cured in stages.

Straight after this healing comes the question from Jesus to the disciples: “Who do you say that I am!” Which prompts the reply from Peter, “You are the Christ!” In terms of having his eyes open, this was like “I see people, they look like trees walking around.” That he still hadn’t fully understood what sort of Messiah Jesus is evident just 2 verses on when Jesus rebukes Peter for trying to stop him going to Jerusalem to die and rise again – Peter had some sight, some understanding – but it was still limited.

One of the exciting things about following Jesus is that we don’t suddenly fully understand him – Instead he continually opens our eyes more fully to the truth of He is and our place in his kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul describes it like this: *“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”*

Too often we try to tame Jesus by trying to make him to be the Messiah we want him to be; - A Jesus who will bless us, but largely leave us alone until we need him. Do you want a Jesus who is safe, but dull – or unsettling but exciting? Our daily prayer could be: Jesus, open my eyes more fully that I may see more of who you are, and less of who I have limited you to be?