

**St. Ninian's Parish Church**

**Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020**

*John 9: 1 - 41*

*Send your Spirit among us, O God, as we meditate on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ together. By it, prepare our minds to hear your Word. Move our hearts to accept what we hear. Purify our will to faithfully follow Jesus Christ in joy and faith. This we pray through the same Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.*

How did this happen? Why is this happening? What caused it? Who caused it? Who is to blame? We don't understand it, and we can't see how we are going to fix this! Those were the questions that Jesus' disciples, and everyone else in society in his day were asking about health problems that they didn't understand and couldn't see how to fix.

'Rabbi,' they said to Jesus, when they encountered a man who had been born blind, 'who sinned, this man or his parents? Why was he born blind?'<sup>1</sup>

Blindness back then was a disaster for people and society. It impoverished people; it made a huge demand on families amongst others to help the person born blind; it caused an increased likelihood of mortality, of death. If people didn't die from blindness, they died from complications associated with it, albeit social ones.

It wasn't just a social and economic disaster; it was a medical disaster as well. No one knew why people were born blind, and no one knew how to cure blindness.

Amidst all these unanswered questions, all that confusion, and amidst the medical, social and economic consequences of the condition, people were left to draw their own conclusions.

The general feeling was that surely bad things can only happen to bad people, or if you like, be some sort of karma. If your bad, then your children will suffer as a consequence. Or, perhaps the world, the universe, God had some way of seeking retribution against people who had done bad things, as a punishment, or to teach people a lesson, or to force people to follow the right way of living.

Jesus was a clever debater. When the disciples asked him these questions based on those assumptions, questions that were impossible for him to answer, 'Why was this man born blind?' Jesus didn't know. And, 'Who sinned, him or his parents?' What a choice! When the disciples asked him these questions that were impossible to answer, as all clever debaters do, Jesus attacked the premise of the question rather than answering it directly. He said, in effect, that neither this man nor his parents were sinners, his blindness was not an act of God punishing or seeking retribution.

Jesus knew that this world is a fallen world, that it is not perfect, that bad things happen in it, that people do bad things, that medically, socially, politically and economically societies struggle to cope at all times, but particularly when faced with crisis like blindness, for example.

Jesus knew that God didn't cause the world to be the way it is. The world is the way it is because that is the price of freedom, of maturity, of growing up and being independent, of not being the Garden of Eden where life is immature. The world, and the life that lives on it, can't live with and be protected by its parent all its life; who would want to live that way? The world, life and we have to grow up, make our own way, our own mistakes, live our own lives.

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<sup>1</sup> John 9: 2

For the world to be free to live, for life to be free, for people to be free there has to be a separation to some extent from God our parent.

'Jesus answered; "It is not that this man or his parents sinned, he was born blind so that God's power might be displayed in curing him..."<sup>2</sup>

Like any loving parent when their children move out of home to make their own way in life, God does not stop caring for his children, for the life that he created. Like all loving parents God does not want to be separated from the life that he created. God continues to offer love, help, direction, support, care and comfort when needed, like all loving parents – even if the life they created wants to make their own way in this world. That is how the power of God is expressed in this world. The power of God is not revealed in judgement, condemnation, fire, brimstone or a virus – what kind of a parent would that be? The power of God is revealed in love, reaching out, caring and healing and weeping and supporting.

That expression of the power of God is what Jesus displayed. And it confused many people who thought that God was an angry God of retribution.

We are still confused today. I read one comment this week reflecting on this global shutdown and the noticeable effect it has had on the environment: clean rivers in Venice; vastly reduced air pollution; a significant decrease in the release of global warming gasses for example, that person suggested that the world was cleaning itself, that Covid-19 is the vaccine and that we are the world's virus.

There are few more horrible ideas. Human beings are not a virus. This is not something we deserve or should expect. We are not being punished for sin; God is not judging us.

This situation, however, is something that is unprecedented as everyone is saying. It is something that we don't fully understand. It is something that we don't fully know yet what to do about. Just like the disciples and the society of the first century who didn't understand and asked questions like how, why, and what when confronted with blindness and its medical, economic and social consequences, so we are asking ourselves, why did this happen, what should we do, how is this going to end?

For those of us who are disciples of Jesus Christ and believers in a loving God, in response to these questions we need to believe that this is a time not for blaming people for doing wrong, or abandoning them to their fate, or pointing the finger of judgement, but rather for believing that the power of God can be displayed in curing our present troubles. 'Jesus answered; "he was born blind so that God's power might be displayed in curing him..."'

All around us the power of God is being displayed in helping to cure our present situation: healthcare workers risking their own health to cure others; clever people working and thinking harder to find a vaccine and invent others ways of providing healing; people looking out for each other in their communities; people coming together, even if they can't physically be together to offer help and love and support. Governments leading, people debating, working long shifts, and responding rapidly.

There are those who are being selfish, who are attributing blame, who see this as an opportunity to advance their own agenda or make a profit, but that is not the power God at work. The power of God in the world is the power to believe that human beings can value all that this world offers us – that is to say we can love God. The power of God in the world is the

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<sup>2</sup> John 9: 3

power to believe that human beings can value their own lives and what they can do and achieve in this world - that is to say we can love ourselves. The power of God in the world is the power to believe that human beings can value the lives of other human beings so much that we are prepared to make huge sacrifices for others – that is to say we can love our neighbours. That belief in loving God, ourselves and our neighbours is the power of God in the world, transforming the world.

When Covid-19 first hit the world, we were blind. That has caused enormous medical, social, political and economic upheaval. Blind we may have been, but this is not the time to accept that blindness, and to ask who made us blind and why. Now is the time to believe in the way of Jesus Christ that by loving God, that is by believing the answers to this crisis already lie in the world around us waiting to be discovered; and by loving ourselves, that is by believing in the power of what we each have to offer the world at this time; and by loving other people, that is by believing in the power of supporting and caring for others, we might be blind now, but we are beginning to see.

One day, we too will say about this crisis, ‘...once I was blind, now I can see.’

*Now to the one who can keep you from falling and set you in the presence of his glory, jubilant and above reproach, to the only God our saviour, be glory and majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now, and for evermore. Amen.*