



Lent 2023 Gospel Conversations Session 3

Opening Worship

The man born blind John 9

You need to have read the whole chapter before the session as it is too long to reproduce here.

Context

John 8. 12 – 59 relates a dispute and condemnation concerning who Jesus claims to be. In v 12 he is challenged for saying he is the light of the world. This leads to the dispute and condemnation in the episode with the man born blind (note the contrast between blindness and light.) The story goes on into ch 10 where good sheep are identified – those who hear his voice.

Unlike many other healings, this man does not ask to be healed. Jesus performs a **sign**, followed by dialogue and then commentary. It is not the miracle which is the important thing but the discussion which follows. The man hears Jesus before he sees him, and we really need to read this story along with the first part of chapter 10 where hearing the voice is so important to faith.

Note the gradual development in the faith of the man as he gradually recognises who Jesus is: v 11 he sees him, v 17 he calls him a prophet, v 33 he recognises he must be from God, v 38 he worships him. The irony is that the man receives sight and 'sees' Jesus, while the others in the story seem to be missing the point and not seeing the truth.

Blind people in scripture may be those deprived of natural sight, those who are morally blind who cannot discern between right and wrong, and those who are spiritually blind through ignorance or self-will. This man is simply blind but the onlookers seek to attach a different significance to his condition. *Who did wrong – him or his parents?* It was believed that only the wicked suffered and that there must be an explanation for any disability. Like lepers, blind people would be outcast, unable to work, socially isolated. Note that nobody seems to want to celebrate with the man and, even when he is healed, they throw him out. Even his parents seem to disown him.

The structure

John often favours a sevenfold structure. Each scene is primarily a conversation between two groups/people.

v 1 – 7 Jesus and the man are introduced. Question re who is to blame. Opportunity for works of God to be seen. Jesus says there is an urgency about his work. The ‘hour’ is coming. Night and day compared. Healing itself is very short. Spittle. Go wash cf Naaman in 2 Kings 5.

v 8 – 12 Miracle must be attested. Neighbours and friends appear. Is it really the man they know? The man explains the miracle. Nobody knows where Jesus is.

v. 13 – 17 Main antagonists enter. The man was taken to the Pharisees – for a ruling? We are told it was a sabbath day. ‘And now I see.’ Division about who Jesus is. This man is not from God v how could a sinful man do this? The man is challenged to say Jesus is a prophet. Scene is set for interrogation.

v 18 – 23 Central most important section. Pharisees disappear and the protagonists are now ‘the Jews.’ Change of tactics. Was he ever blind? Maybe he wasn’t. Parents are called. They are not keen to identify Jesus as a healer *because they fear the Jews*. Any Jew who confessed Jesus as God was likely to get into trouble.

v 24 – 34 Authorities ‘know this man is a sinner.’ Challenge man to say what he thinks. *One thing I know . . .* They ask again how it happened and he says he’s already told them. Discussion re Moses and Jesus. Man is amazed they don’t see what’s happened. Authorities begin to say blindness was caused by sin. Man is driven out.

v 35 – 38 Jesus reappears, finds the man and asks questions re Son of Man. The man finally says *I believe, Lord*.

v 39 – 41 Jesus pronounces *I came into the world for judgement etc* Pharisees hear the conversation (how?) and asks if they are blind. Because they say they can see, their sin *remains*.



Choose some of these questions to discuss

1. How do you think this story would be received by a blind person?
2. What do you think about the suggested link between the man's condition and his (or his parents') moral state? Can sin/bad behaviour cause illness?



*Jesus Opens the Eyes of a Man born Blind (1311), Duccio di Buoninsegna
National Gallery, London*

The first of last week's images (the mosaic) showed the story unfolding from left to right. The image above does the same but it's not quite so obvious. Jesus' disciples watch intently as, in the centre of the painting, the blind man is healed, with solemnity, and a certain sternness. Then he is seen on the right-hand side discarding his stick and looking up and out *into his new future*.

3. In your journey with Christ, are there ways in which your view of yourself and of the future has changed, or is changing?
4. Are there specific moments that you now recall which were important in this alteration? What happened? Would you have described them as 'healings'?
5. Can you recognise the slow, regular movement from seeing Jesus, naming him, recognising his role and worshipping him?

Time for Reflection



Share one feeling and one thought at the end of this session.

We can't find a decent poem inspired by this story. If you find one, let us know!

Finish by saying the Grace together.

Excursus: other references to the blind in the NT

Healings

Luke 4.18 the Spirit is upon me – to bring sight to the blind (but of what kind? See above.)

Matt 9.27 Jesus cures two blind men.

12.22 Jesus heals a demoniac who is blind and mute (cf Luke 7.22)

15.30 . . . they brought him many people inc blind

20.30 Jesus cures two more blind men.

21.14 the blind came to him in the temple and he healed them

Matt 11.5 Go and tell John what you hear and see – the blind receive their sight cf Luke 7.21

Mark 8.22 blind man at Bethsaida

Mark 10.46 blind Bartimaeus

John 9 man born blind – our text – the longest account of a healing plus commentary

Blind Guides – moral/spiritual blindness

Matt 15.14 cf Luke 6.39 Plants not planted by God are blind leading blind, and they will fall into a pit

23.16 - 24 Woe to you blind guides

Luke 14.13 ff when you give a banquet, invite the blind

10. 21 and 11.37 Can a demon open the eyes of the blind? If he could do that, couldn't he stop him from dying?

12.40 he has blinded their hearts

Acts 13.11 conversion of Saul after temporary blindness

Romans 2.19 If you are sure you are a guide to the blind, to those who are in darkness

Rom 11.25 blindness has happened because . . .

Eph 4.18 because of blindness of heart

2 Cor 4.4 the god of this world has blinded the mind of unbelievers

2 Pet 1.9 for anyone who lacks these things is short-sighted and blind

1 John 2.11 whoever hates another believer . . . is in darkness . . . and darkness has brought on blindness

Revn 3.17 You say you are rich – you don't know you are blind

