

***Ephesians 5.8-14***

Light and dark are suggestive metaphors for contrasting ways of living. 'Darkness' stands for shameful, secretive behaviour that not only corrupts individuals, but also ruptures community life. By contrast, 'light' belongs with 'all that is good and right and true' – behaviour that is honoured when it is practised openly and publicly. If darkness brings death, then light is life-giving.

***John 9.1-41***

Jesus arrived in Jerusalem during the Feast of Booths, commemorating Israel's time in the wilderness. On the festival's opening night, four golden candlesticks were lit in the Temple's Court of Women to symbolise God leading his people through the wilderness by pillars of cloud and fire. This inspires the idea that Jesus is the light of the world.

The blind man is of low economic status, but also stigmatised as a sinner because he is disabled. His condition excludes him from Temple worship and affects his parents as well. Here Jesus sees an opportunity to do God's work, even though it is the sabbath day. Using the methods of a traditional healer, he makes mud for healing, and tells the man to wash in the pool whose name symbolises Jesus as the one sent by God. Having never seen before, his sight is nothing short of a new creation.

Jesus leaves and the man has to deal with critical Pharisees, who cannot believe that Jesus could have been sent from God when he is so careless about obeying Moses. First, they dispute whether the man was actually blind, and demand that his parents verify this. Then they doubt whether Jesus could actually have healed him. The Pharisees' insistence on discrediting his testimony only makes the man more defiant. As his eyes become more open to the truth of Jesus, theirs become more closed. They expel him from the synagogue with a flourish of hard-hearted arrogance.

When Jesus returns, he finds a man whose faith has grown in the face of adversity so that he is able to make a confession of faith. He is now an example to the evangelist's community of the courageous faith they need in their struggles with hostile synagogues. By contrast, the critical Pharisees sink so deeply into the shadows that they are as good as blind, to the light of the world and also to their own self-deception.

***Reflections***

1. Jesus affirms that disability (and illness) is not related to sin. Is that important today as we see Coronavirus affect some more badly than others?
2. The man's testimony shows that he has insights into Jesus that others are lacking. What new insights into Jesus and the Father do we have or see in our current situation?
3. How do we relate to the disabled? Are we prejudiced in our thinking or do we make assumptions about their ability? Is our attitude changed by what is happening around us today?
4. This is a significant moment in the blind man's life, and he doesn't see Jesus until later. Are there those who struggle to make sense of a significant moment in their life, who fail to see Jesus in their circumstances? Where is God in this? Where is God in what is happening today?
5. Proper religion included observing the sabbath. We might see worship in church with others as 'proper'. Does this story help us to see that 'proper' is a loose term that changes depending on circumstances?
6. The story is about Jesus giving new life to the man. What do we see today that is new? Are friends more obvious? Will we come to rely on people we don't know or don't particularly like? Who is our Good Samaritan? Will we find new friends in our time of need?