



# Sunday Reflection



in the Charges of St Margaret, Renfrew & St John, Johnstone  
**For Sunday 22 March 2020**  
**while all Church worship is Suspended**

## **The Gospel reading set for Lent 4 is John 9:1-41**

1 As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.  
2 His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 3 Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7 saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8 The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' 9 Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' 10 But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' 11 He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' 12 They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.' 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' 16 Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. 17 So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.' 18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19 and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' 20 His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but we do not know how it is that

now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.' 24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' 25 He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' 26 They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' 27 He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' 28 Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' 30 The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' 34 They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 36 He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' 37 Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' 38 He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. 39 Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' 41 Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see," your sin remains.'

## Reflection for this Gospel

**"They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out."** (John 9:34)

### An illustration to set the scene

Sometimes it takes the most unlikely person to hear what experts are saying and challenge those in authority. In August 2018, the Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg saw that governments were not paying enough attention to climate scientists and decided to protest outside the Parliament building in Stockholm. In January 2019, she spoke directly to those in power at the World Economic Forum. Most of the delegates

listened politely, but continued to travel by private jet. Some people argued that “children cannot lead us” while others mocked her for her autism. Fortunately, many others did accept her message and she has won many awards, although many of those in power still refused to engage and preferred to maintain the status quo.

### **From the Gospel Teaching**

In today’s Gospel reading (*for Lent 4 not the Mothering Sunday gospel the Primus used in his Live Streamed Service to the SEC*) it is an outsider who recognises Jesus as someone who understands the will of God, and who challenges the authority of the Pharisees. The man born blind is a beggar. Unable to work, he is dismissed by society – and even Jesus’ disciples – as a sinner (or at least the son of sinners). But Jesus says that this is not the case; that the man was “born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him”. And indeed he proves to have great wisdom and insight.

The Pharisees were well respected by society as righteous people who avoided sin and obeyed the Law. They were convinced that they knew what God wanted them to do and how to do it. They were unable to see that God was doing something new in Jesus. After receiving his sight, the formerly blind man tells the Pharisees what happened to him and who was responsible. He recognises that Jesus must, at the very least, be a prophet and clearly sees that Jesus’ ability to give sight to the blind must come from God. The Pharisees, however, are not so clear-sighted. They look for arguments to explain away what happened so that they can maintain their world-view. Some question the facts: they do not believe that the man was born blind and interrogate his parents. Some question Jesus’ powers: they dismiss him as not from God and a sinner because he opened the man’s eyes on the sabbath. Some are a little more open and wonder how a sinner could perform such signs. But, even in their eyes, Jesus is still a sinner, and they do not really listen to what they are being told. And when the formerly blind man sticks to his guns and makes a powerful argument in support of Jesus, challenging their preconceived ideas, they really shut their eyes to what is going on. The former beggar tells the Pharisees that Jesus is a prophet. He challenges their disbelief, saying,

Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

The Pharisees do not like this at all, and their prejudices harden as they answer "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" They drive the man out.

By the time Jesus finds him, the man believes that Jesus is the Son of Man and worships him. He has used his God-given powers of reason to "join the dots" and reflect on his experience, and this overrides what he must have been told since birth about sin.

### **So what do we make of this – some application**

It is the outsider who responds to Jesus and comes to understand who he is. The Pharisees – who thought they were already "right with God" – are so stuck in their assumptions that they cannot see how the former beggar could have anything to teach them. Their sense of certainty, their conviction that they know the mind of God, makes them completely blind to the fact that God is doing something new in Jesus. Sometimes, it is the most unlikely person who is clear-sighted enough to see what God is saying or doing and to challenge the Church to respond.

**"They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out."** (John 9:34)

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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