

Discipleship, Illumination and New Life – a short Scripture series focusing on the Key Gospels of Lent Year A



**'Go and wash in the pool at Siloam'**

**John 9:1-41**

This Lent our Liturgy follows the Gospel of Matthew. In particular, we hear the accounts of Jesus and the woman of Samaria, the Healing of the Blind Bartemeus and the raising of Lazarus.

John Huntriss, Scripture Scholar reflects on each of these Gospel accounts and offers us some questions to ponder. Listen to the video and then take some time to quietly reflect. You may wish to do this with other people in your parish or simply as a time of personal prayer. We suggest that you:

1. Read the Gospel
2. Watch the Video
3. Ponder the questions offered. Below follows John's text.

## **VIDEO TWO**

### **JOHN 9:1-41 Jesus heals a man born blind.**

#### **TO PONDER John 9:1-7**

**Are misfortunes always a punishment for sin?** So often people ask, "Why has God done this to me?" {They apparently forget to ask the same question when times are good.]

Job's friends insist that he must have committed terrible sin to be suffering such terrible misfortunes. He knows he has not (and we know it, for the book began by noting his goodness and piety); but he cannot understand why he is nevertheless suffering so. At the end of the book he demands an answer from God, and God shows him that there is a great deal that is beyond our understanding, but is hidden in the wisdom of God.

In Exodus 20:5 / Deuteronomy 5:9 we read of God punishing sin to the third and fourth generations. Should we read this as meaning that guilt passes down to subsequent generations? or as recognising that the evil consequences of an evil act may pass down to subsequent generations?

Jeremiah 31 :29-30 ridicules the idea of inherited guilt, with a spoof proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the sons' teeth are set on edge". (Ridiculous!) Ezekiel 18 cites the same spoof proverb and takes the whole chapter to spell out our individual responsibility for our good or bad actions.

[You may, or may not, choose to ponder what all this might say to current demands for apologies and compensation for historical wrongs.]

The most important text is the beginning of Luke 13. A tower has fallen: there have been casualties. Jesus asks: were those victims guilty of some particularly great sin? His answer to his own question: "No". (If, then, the fall of the tower was not divine intervention, punishing conspicuous sinners, it presumably fell, as towers do, from poor building, or poor maintenance, or an earthquake.) "But", he continues, "you should all take it as a warning to repent". So, there are always two questions: first,

"Why?", the answer generally being human or natural causes; and second, "What might God be saying to us through what has happened?"

The answer throughout is: that the weight of our sufferings is not in proportion to the weight of our sins. There is no such neat correlation.

**So why was the man born blind?** "That the works of God might be made manifest in him", says Jesus. The opening of the eyes of the blind is listed by Isaiah (35:5) among "messianic signs" of God's decisive intervention **in** the world. When St. John Baptist, in prison, began to wonder if he had been right to identify Jesus as Messiah, Jesus replies by pointing him to evidence of just this kind (Matthew 11:4-6). The Gospel regularly stresses hard evidence, inviting us to think: "This happened: how will you respond?"

**"I am the Light of the World"** - the themes of light and darkness, symbols of good and evil.

In Genesis 1 God's first creation was light. When Jesus spoke in v.3 of the revealing of God's "works", that choice of word may be meant to take us back to God's works in Creation. John 1 strongly echoes Genesis 1. The theme of light is prominent (4-9). John 1 is like an overture, introducing many of the tunes we shall be hearing.) The Word is the light shining in the dark; the "kindly light" who leads us "amid the encircling gloom" (St. John Henry Newman). See Psalm 119: 105; or think of the pillar of fire going before Israel in the desert by night (Exodus 13:21-2), just as the Paschal Candle leads us into the darkened church at the Easter Vigil, the sign of the Light of the risen Christ.

Baptism, which is central to the Easter Vigil, is the sacrament through which we are brought into the Light, and was anciently called "enlightenment" (Hebrews 6:4 & 10:32). At Candlemass Simeon called the child Jesus "a light to enlighten the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32). John 3: 19-21 is of central importance. The light shows up the darkness, which therefore hates the light. This succinctly explains why Jesus was bound to fall foul of a fallen world.

### **TO PONDER John 9:8-34**

**What do we make of miracles?** What do we make of them when we read of them in the Bible?

It can feel very different when you come close to one. The healing of Jack Sullivan's crippling back pain was accepted by the Church as the miracle which opened the way for Pope Benedict to beatify (now St.) John Henry Newman. It was quite an experience, a short while before the beatification, to be in Westminster Cathedral where he ministered as deacon at the Sung Mass and spoke of what had happened to him, and to be a few yards away as he walked in and out in procession. Perhaps you saw him at the Beatification Mass.

If you accept that God created all there is, then it is a small thing to believe that he can perform miracles. The question then is not, Could he perform this particular one?

but, would he? Did he? The Church is rightly very cautious about accepting as authentic everything that someone claims to have been a miracle. Robert Runcie, formerly Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, said once that he did indeed believe in miracles, but he also believed God does not always want us to be too sure about when he has done one. That sounded wise.

Has anyone you know been suddenly healed, without any obvious medical explanation? I can think of two cases, one half a century ago, the other a few weeks ago. The first certainly made me stop and think; and although I'd had more years to think about these things, so did the recent one. It really is important to be very cautious about claiming or dismissing what may appear to be a miracle. As in that matter of the tower that fell (Luke 13), we want to know what happened, but the more important question is, "What might God be saying through this?"

In one of Jesus' parables (end of Luke 16) a beggar, Lazarus, has died and gone to heaven, while a rich man who had showed him no mercy is in hell. The rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers to change their ways: Abraham replies that they wouldn't listen. He was right; but why wouldn't they?