

John 9:1-41

Jesus says

“As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

The image of light shining in darkness is a powerful symbol of hope.

We think of lighthouses, keeping ships from danger.

Or perhaps a torchlight, guiding bushwalkers home when they've lost their way.

At a time when we are facing unprecedented challenges with the spread of COVID-19, we long for that kind of light.

Across the globe, church leaders in Britain and Ireland are asking people to light a candle in their window at 7 p.m. this very Sunday “as a visible symbol of the light of life, Jesus Christ”.

So how does Jesus bring light to our life?

Let's look at this morning's gospel reading from John Chapter Nine.

We see that Jesus brings light when we face obstacles we can't fully explain or overcome.

Notice how the passage begins:

As Jesus went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

The disciples want a quick and easy explanation.

Who's to blame?

Who's responsible?

In Jesus' day being blind – and from birth at that – pushed you into social isolation. It excluded you from everyday life and made you dependent on the goodwill of others. No wonder Jesus' followers are looking for a simple cause.

Notice then what Jesus does.

Without denying the sovereignty of God or the sinfulness of humanity he re-frames the conversation from the issue of cause towards the issue of outcomes.

³*“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*

This man's plight becomes the occasion for the glory of God to be displayed in a new way in and through him.

In an extra-ordinarily physical display of love and power Jesus makes mud from his own saliva and smears it on the man's eyes. He sends him to wash his eyes in the Pool of Siloam and when he returns he has 20:20 vision.

Such an amazing miracle that causes an absolute commotion! His neighbours think it's him; others aren't so sure. As for the man, he knows it is this man called Jesus who's responsible for his sight, but as far where He is, the man has no idea.

And then matters take a more sinister turn and we learn that Jesus brings light in the midst of division and opposition

The man is presented to the Pharisees who demand to know who gave him his sight, especially as it happened on a Sabbath.

They are divided; some say the man's healer couldn't come from God since he clearly cares little for accepted religious practice. Others demand to know how a sinner could perform such an amazing miracle.

Next, the man's parents are called in for questioning but they straight away pass the ball back to him. He's old enough to speak for himself; ask him.

Finally the man himself fronts up for an interrogation.

There is much he doesn't know; and many questions he can't answer. But he can offer this word of testimony:

"One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

But all this is to no avail.

The end of the encounter is dramatic and apparently decisive:

³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Now his social isolation seems complete. Not only is his past called into question his present seems hopeless. Rejected by his leaders it seems there is nowhere he can go.

Except there is.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" [e] ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? [f] 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, [g] I believe." And he worshiped him.

Earlier in John 6:29 Jesus has defined the work of God in these terms:

"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

And that is how the work of God is revealed in this man. Not just in the miracle of physical sight – as wonderful as that is. More so – in the miracle of spiritual sight – being able to see Jesus for who He truly is, believing that He is the Lord who gives life to all who find their refuge in Him.

That is how Jesus brings light and life.

My friends, many in our world are anxious that we are facing dark days ahead. How true they are, I do not know.

But these things I do know.

I know that we can face those days with the assurance that Jesus, the light of the world is with us.

I know that when we are tempted to play the blame game and seek quick and easy explanations for the challenges we are facing he will call us to something better.

To believe that even at this time, especially at this time, His work can be revealed in us.

In lives of quiet trust, like choosing not to grasp and hoard.

In words of re-assuring hope, like saying 'with God's help we will get through this.'

In actions of care and compassion, like knocking on a neighbour's door and checking if they're OK.

And I know that when we are tempted to despair because of the division and opposition around us he will call us to something better.

To believe that He is our life and our Lord, the one alone worthy of our worship.

To see Him as he truly is, with us and for us.

So this evening we may well place a candle in our windows.

But let's ask Jesus to place his light in our lives – a light so bright and so unquenchable that others are drawn to find hope and healing in Him.

AMEN