

JOHN 9:1-12
THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

How do we make sense of the world? Sometimes we don't even try! It's not a question that we ask often, but it's one of life's big questions! How do we make sense of the world? Children love the world because it is a great adventure, to discover something new every day that is fascinating and exciting. There are times when our view of the world is very clear: we know what to think and we understand that "this is this and that is that"; it is clear-cut and straightforward; we have our plans, hopes, and aspirations and we're heading in that direction and nothing is going to stop us now! A few years ago I found a picture that showed life as a road and far from being straight and long, this road goes round and under and through and back on itself and there's a tree in middle, so be careful not to hit the tree! I find that picture so much more like the kind of life most people live and a view of the world that is complicated and difficult and the answers to questions are not always clear-cut; there is usually another angle from which to look. So we become confused and our view of the world is complicated and in some moments, even dark, when there seems no light at all!

"Will the real Jesus please stand up?" That is the title of a radio debate that took place in the USA in 1995, but was recently posted on YouTube! "Who is Jesus?" was the question they debated. There is a deal of confusion about the answer to that question; we're not exactly sure of the answer. Church headlines recently have all been about politics and education and the Church of Scotland attitude to religious observance in schools and that's an important issue, or the Church's attitude to the referendum and that's an important issue too. But here's a question fundamental to all of these other answers for the Church – "who is Jesus?" If someone asked you that question tomorrow in the Co-op would you be able to give them a reasoned and reasonable answer? Or would you say, embarrassed, "I don't know!"

John sets about answering that question. "Will the real Jesus please stand up?" John tells us these stories of Jesus and what Jesus has done. In chapter 9 he tells the story of Jesus healing a man born blind and the story is wonderfully told to intertwine what Jesus did with the discussion that this healing raises. All the way through this story, the question that hangs in the air is "Who is Jesus?" John tells this story and all the other stories in his gospel to do two things: first of all, to show us something to believe about Jesus, that He is the Son of God, the Messiah; and secondly, that faith makes a difference to us; "*by believing...*" (John 20:31) The miracles, for John, are signs, signs pointing us in direction of Jesus.

Jesus is in Jerusalem, with the Feast of Tabernacles perhaps still going on. This feast includes the whole Temple being lit up at night inside with thousands of candles and that light bursting through the windows from the Temple into the darkness of the city (no street lights, remember!) and with the temple on top of the hill, it is lit up like a beacon for people to see from miles around. People see that and Jesus says "*I am...*" (John 9:5) This is one of seven times he uses that way of speaking: the bread of life, the vine, the good shepherd etc. Here, He says: "*I am...*" (John 9:5) Intertwined with that thought and what it means for Jesus to be the light of the world is the story of a man born blind. It is not just story that John tells, but a serious reflection on the meaning of life, God and universe goes along with it. "*Rabbi...*" (John 9:2) "*How were...*" (John 9:10) "*How can...*" (John 9:16b) Who is this man who did this? Some people are more concerned that Jesus did this on the Sabbath than that He did it at all!

Jesus met a man born blind. "*He spat...*" (John 9:6f) This is the very simple telling of the story, but it was to lead to all kinds of questions. "*Isn't...*" (John 9:8f) How did He

do it? Where is this man now? A committee of inquiry is sent to interview the man and then his parents and time and time again the man tells the story of what happened to him. *"One thing..." (John 9:25)* The evidence is there for all to see: a man who had been blind can now see, can now do something that he had never been able to do before. It is fantastic! The man's life is changed completely and there can be no argument about that. He can't explain it; for a time he's not even sure who this man was that healed him and he rejoices. For John this was a sign and even for Jesus it is an illustration of something deeper and arguably more significant.

Jesus brought light into the darkness for the healed man. He had lived his life in a world that was all darkness from the day he was born; there was no light in his world at all until Jesus wrapped his eyes in mud and told him to go wash it off! It was great and worth celebrating in itself; there are people around us who would be delighted to have this kind of healing effected on their bodies today. But there's more to this story than just the healing of this man's eyes. It is the story of light dawning in his heart and mind as he understands something of what happened and who did it and it is also the story of other people not seeing and rejecting the light, turning away from the light because the don't like what they see!

"Who did this?" It is a bit like an interrogation and all way through the story the answer gets deeper and more profound. Who did this? *"The man they call Jesus" (John 9:10) "He is a prophet" (John 9:17)* (that's a step up, perhaps as high as the man could imagine going with Jesus) *"If this man were not from God..." (John 9:33) "Lord..." (John 9:38)* Here is a man on a journey of discovery that began with the man called Jesus and ended with a profession of faith and worship to someone he will call "Lord". It is a journey of discovery and understanding that comes not all at once but that dawned on him with time. Jesus still draws people in this way: Christianity is the biggest of the world's faiths; it is growing at an extraordinary rate across the world as people are drawn to Jesus and believe. The part of the world where this is happening slowest is in Western Europe and within Western Europe the place where we see this least is in the UK; I'm not sure why. But even in the UK, there are stories of people, young and old who are drawn by Jesus; who want to discover more about Him and who put their faith in Him; people who still go on this journey of discovery. Light dawns in their hearts and minds as they come to see who Jesus is and what Jesus has done.

Jesus the light of the world gives us something to believe. Who is Jesus? There are lots of answers to that question, but here are two: He is the Son of God, God present in the world. We often think that God is not interested in us or our world, but Jesus' being in the world says the exact opposite; He is God present in the world. Secondly, He is the messiah, the One sent from God to change the world, to bring light into the darkness, hope for despair, forgiveness for guilt, salvation for people who are lost, strength for weak and vulnerable and fragile people; He is sent by God to change the world from the inside and to share in our suffering. Who is Jesus? At the very least, he is these two things; there is something here for us to believe and believing brings light to our hearts and minds. "We can 'make sense' of a dark world only by believing in the one who came to be 'the light of the world'" (Leslie Newbigin)

But this is neither straightforward nor automatic. There is another point of view in this story that declares that Jesus cannot possibly be from God, but is a sinner. Why not? He broke the Sabbath when healing this man. Good men don't break the Sabbath; Jesus broke the Sabbath; He is not a good man. Jesus broke the Sabbath because He the healed man; He broke Sabbath because He made some mud. He worked and it was against the law to work. The Pharisees failed to see the big picture because their eyes were focussed on something else. They missed the grace of God because

they were caught up in their huge desire to make sure the law was kept. Good men don't break the Sabbath; Jesus can't be good; it is simple as far as they were concerned, but they missed the grace of God by their blindness. There are all kinds of blindfolds that we wear and sometimes we miss grace of God at work in our lives or in lives of others because of them: people whose lifestyles are unconventional by our book, or those who don't behave 'properly' in Church, or those who ask awkward questions, those who... fill in blanks for yourself and because we wear these blindfolds we miss God being gracious to people who don't conform to our expected pattern. Jesus, the light of the world, shows up the blindness of those who will not see.

"Now you..." (Ephesians 5:8f) Here's something to take away. This is about us. Christians are 'light', reflecting Jesus to the world. We talked about that earlier: we reflect Jesus to the world, we show people what Jesus is like. Paul's challenge to the Christians in Ephesus is to *"Live as..." (5:8b)* which is all about the qualities of our lives and the way in which we live. Being good, doing what is good - this shows the world what Jesus is like! A few years ago there was a survey done in Scotland of people who don't go to Church and why they don't belong to Churches; the results were published as book called *Believe it or not!* There is a whole section called 'it's the Church that puts me off!' and it reflected the church's bad record; we can add to that so many pieces of bad behaviour and publicity and division. But Christians are a power to transform the world; we live in a world where it seems that darkness is in control: evil things, bad behaviour, unbelief, suffering; yet we are light and the thing about light is that it breaks the darkness down. As we reflect Jesus to the world, the light shines and the darkness is broken.

We spent 17 years living in Caithness, and there is an expanse of moor where there seems to be nothing; if you drive some of the roads across the moor during the day you will see nothing and it seems that no-one lives there. But when you travel the same road at night, the landscape is covered with pinpricks of light, individual crofts and houses that you can see from miles away, the light shining in the darkness, breaking down the darkness, the darkness does not overcome the light. It is our calling and our power to transform the world by living the light and reflecting Jesus.

Jesus "the light of the world". Christians are "light in the Lord". How do we make sense of the world? It begins with Jesus as the light of the world. A blind man discovered light on day he met Jesus when his eyes were opened; the eyes of his heart were also opened and he believed. Some eyes remained firmly shut, they eyes of those who would not see. There is something here for us to believe, or affirm all over again: Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah. There is something here for us to rejoice in: Jesus transforms our lives, brings to us life in all its fullness. There is something to take away: *"live as..." (Ephesians 5:8)* being right kind of people, doing right kind of things, we reflect Jesus to the world.