

JOHN 9:1-41
WHAT DO YOU SEE?

We all have a story to tell. We may not think it worth telling, but that's a different matter. We all have a story: it has a beginning on the day we were born; it has its ups and downs and it is unique, it is our story and it is not like anyone else's. It is a story of great days, happy days, days and times that we remember well because they were happy, brilliant days. It is a story of difficult days, even dark days, days that we'd rather forget, but these too are ingrained in our memories as part of our story. It might be a story of achievements that we've celebrated; it might be story of missed opportunities that we regret, but we can now do nothing about; it might be a story of mistakes that we've lived to regret. Is it also a story of faith, a story of church and what impact faith has had on shaping our lives? It is a story that can change dramatically in an instant – witness Wednesday in London!

It is also a story that connects with other people's stories. Getting married makes that true in most intimate way, two stories remain two stories, but they are so intertwined with another person's story in the way that we love. The people we go to school with, or work beside, or study with at university or college – some of that is good, creating friendships that last a lifetime, or some of it is bad because the people we think of as friends bully us at school! We saw on Wednesday how stories connect in the most dramatic and catastrophic way: the story of one person who decided to run amok in Central London just when lots of other people were going about their business without thinking, creating memories of a tourist visit to the city that are now very different from what they had planned; or celebrations that have been overshadowed; a policeman doing his job and his family's story now has the most bleak page in it because he was killed. Our stories connect.

Faith connects our story to the story of God's mission in the world. God has done great things for us and for the world, especially in Jesus and faith connects our story to that story. God's story touches our lives and shapes our story because we begin to live our lives by that faith, we put into practice the values that Jesus models and teaches; faith trusts God to keep the promises that He has made. Our story depends on His story and we create a new page in that story every day.

John tells us about a man whose story was changed dramatically when he met Jesus. Here was a man blind from birth and Jesus gives him the sight he has never had. The power and grace of God are at work to transform one man's situation. Jesus did more miracles like this than any other, giving sight to the blind, the work of Messiah. This miracle sparks off a whole controversy as people wrestle with what has happened and what it means. At the centre of the story stands Jesus, "the light of the world", bringing sight to a blind man. The question we ask of all the people in story the, of the blind man, of his parents, of the Pharisees, of Jesus – what did they see?

What did the man see? At the start of the story, he saw nothing; he was blind. Because he was blind, he may well have depended on other people for everything, on his parents, maybe he begged on the street and was that where he met Jesus? We're not told a great deal of detail about this man's story other than he was blind. He saw nothing! But then Jesus came along: "*He spat...*" (*John 9:6f*) All of a sudden, the man could see. Now he saw everything for the very first time; "*he came...*" (*John 9:7*) It is such a dramatic transformation in his life, from nothing to everything, from complete darkness to living in the light and seeing a new world for the first time. It was a total transformation. He saw everything, except one thing: he didn't see the person who healed him; Jesus was gone! The man was delighted to see!

The Pharisees – what did they see? They saw a man whose life had been changed and they wanted to know how this had happened? "*He put...*" (*John 9:15*) It is a simple story for the blind man, but the Pharisees saw something else: this had taken place on the Sabbath, the

day of rest, the day when they were supposed to do no work and this was work as far as they were concerned. They saw that the man who did this must be a trouble-maker, a 'sinner' and sinners can't do miracles. That was all they saw; they didn't see that the man who did this was a prophet and indeed they threw people out who allied themselves with Jesus; they didn't believe that the blind man was all he claimed to be, they didn't trust his story; they refused to believe. At the end of the story there is a conversation about seeing and being blind and it is all about understanding Jesus and having faith – the Pharisees remained blind!

What did the parents see? The man's parents are dragged in to the conversation. What did they see? They saw their son whom they had brought up as a blind boy, then a blind man – they saw him healed! It must have been a delightful moment for them! But the shine is taken off their joy by controversy. They are caught up in the atmosphere of fear created by the Pharisees: "*Is this...*" (John 9:19-21) There is fear in the air and they can taste it! They become cautious; "ask him yourselves; he's old enough to speak for himself!" So, when they really wanted to celebrate, they take a step back; they don't want to get involved; they are afraid of what the Pharisees will do if they say too much!

What did Jesus see? Jesus is at the centre of this story, but He appears only at the start and at the end. He sees two things: first, He sees a man born blind in need of help; seeing the blind man, Jesus goes to work to clear away the darkness and give the man his sight. "*While I...*" (John 9:5) He sees someone in need and heals him; the Sabbath is a day to do good and He gives the man his sight. Secondly, He sees the blindness of the Pharisees: "making mud on the Sabbath is work; good men don't break the Sabbath; therefore Jesus is not a good man." It is so neat and tidy for them, but they didn't see what was right in front of them, the light of the world, the Messiah from God. He saw that blindness and spoke about the judgement of God on those who prefer to stay blind and unbelieving. He saw their blindness and there was a sadness in His heart.

Let's go back to the blind man – at the end of the story, what did he see? He saw Jesus. He hadn't seen Jesus before because Jesus walked away while the man's eyes were covered in mud. But at the end, he did see Jesus. "*Do you...*" (John 9:35-38) He saw Jesus with his eyes; "this is man who healed and saved me!" But he also saw something else with other eyes: he "saw" that Jesus was come from God into the world to be the light of the world and he believed. He understood the importance of who Jesus was and of what Jesus had done in his life and so he believed Jesus and worshipped God. He saw with the eyes of his heart the importance and significance of the healing, that it was more than being able to see the world for the first time, but that the man who did this was a prophet sent from God and more than prophet, the Son of Man come to save the world. The blind man saw this; the Pharisees didn't!

What do you see? How do you respond to this story? Is there something of disbelief because we're not very sure about miracle stories; by their nature, they are out of the ordinary, not part of our view of the world, or of our experience of life generally, so it is perfectly understandable that we react with a measure of disbelief. Others are completely sceptical! Is there delight in your heart to see both the compassion and power of Jesus at work in the world and especially to help someone in need? This is the kind of idea of Jesus that we like, the man of compassion to needy people and we are delighted to read this story of the man whose life was changed; it encourages us to pray for other lives to be changed by the same compassion and power. Is that what you see? Or do we see what the Pharisees saw, someone who disturbs their neat and tidy world, who challenges the order of things and we don't like it; do we see Jesus as the disturber of the peace and we don't want our peace disturbed?

Do we see Jesus as the "light of the world"? He has come to bring light to our world, to a world that often sits in darkness. He has come to show us what God is like, to show us the love and power of God at work in the world, to connect that love and power of almighty God to our everyday world, to our stories of life. Jesus, the light of the world, changes our world, changes

our lives for good and for ever – is that what we see? Do we love Him for it? Do we put our faith and trust in Him? Do we live our lives in His ways? “*You were...*” (*Ephesians 5:8f*) Is that what we see for ourselves, the path ahead, a road to travel, following Jesus, being children of the light?

There are days, when we wake up, we have no idea what momentous events are about to happen to us or in our world. Wednesday was a day like that for many people in London. The day of John chapter 9 was a day like that for the blind man. These are momentous events that changed lives for ever, events not in their control! Our stories are not often like that; our days are perhaps more ordinary, more mundane; there are good days, and difficult days; but God is in our story too. God is the help and strength of our lives too. God is able to help us too. The story of God’s grace and power connects to our story, even if that story feels ordinary and mundane, and Jesus walks with us. There are pages of our story that are still to be written: we can write them as stories of love for Jesus and faith in Him; or we can write them as stories that keep Jesus excluded, not seeing what it is that He has done. Where does Jesus connect with your story? What do you see of Jesus in the story of your life?