

Lent 4A 2020.

1 Samuel 16.1-13

Ps 23

Ephesians 5.8-14

John 9.1-41

Here we are, half way through Lent. The season of Lent developed as a time of preparation for people who were going to be baptised at Easter. Baptismal candidates spent the six weeks of Lent in intensive preparation for their baptism. Given that the focus of Lent was discipleship - what it meant to follow Jesus, how to grow as a disciple of Jesus and so on - the Bible readings, especially the gospel readings on the Sundays in Lent are shaped the same way. We can read the gospel readings and learn more of discipleship from them.

For instance, today's reading, that very long reading from John's gospel, has a particular focus and that focus is 'seeing'. The account of the healing of the blind man starts off being about Jesus healing a man who literally couldn't see, he was literally blind. Then the story moves to the man who had been healed giving testimony to the religious leaders that Jesus was the person who had healed him. A fair bit of argy bargy goes on, and towards the end of the incident the man who had been blind criticizes the religious leaders for not seeing that based on what he had done, Jesus was at the least a man from God. The final section of the incident is Jesus helping the man who had been blind to see that Jesus was the messiah.

The story on the surface is about physically being able to see. But the real story is about seeing who Jesus is - the messiah, the Son of God. And that 'seeing who Jesus is' is important for anyone who is interested in exploring the idea of discipleship, or who is a disciple and wants to continue to follow Jesus.

All of us are called to be a disciple of Jesus through our baptism. Whether we were baptised as an infant or adult, whether we were baptised in the Anglican church or another Christian church, whether a lot of water was used or a little water only, whether it was called Baptism or Christening, all of us have been called through that action, to be a disciple of Jesus. To follow Jesus. And part of that is seeing who Jesus is. Chances are if we are Christians, if we have decided somehow to follow Jesus, we will have seen that Jesus is the Lord. We will have seen that He is the Son of God. He is the messiah. Chances are we have already seen that and accepted it.

But, there is more to see, and this is the part that continues throughout our Christian life.

So, for instance we see who Jesus is, the Son of God, the messiah and so on, but we need to see what that means for us. What does it mean for our decisions, for our life style, for the way we use the resources God gives us. Those insights come to us as we continue the Christian journey.

Our eyes continue to be opened. We see ourselves as people who are unconditionally loved by God. Who are forgiven through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We see other people as loved by God as valuable in the eyes of God no matter who they are. We see the world as God's world, where God acts and continues to create. We see ourselves as stewards of all of God's creation. We see God as being worthy of our trust. Worthy of our worship. Worthy of our allegiance and service.

This is a process. It doesn't all happen at once. We gradually see more as we go along. As we continue to read and reflect on the scriptures, as we engage with God in prayer, as we meet together to share our insights with each other, as we continue to learn and develop. As we do these kinds of things the insights come. We see more of God and the reality of God.

One of the things that's important to see right now in the midst of the coronavirus uncertainty is that God is trustworthy. We are in testing times as the implications of the actions to try to limit the spread of coronavirus begin to hit home. Last Wednesday I flew to Canberra for the consecration of the new

bishop to the Australian Defence Force and there was hardly anyone on the planes. I was speaking to one of the cabin stewards and he said he expected to lose his job. People all over the community will lose their jobs as people hunker down and self-isolate and business shrinks. The extraordinary panic buying we have seen is a really good indicator of just how nervous people are.

I sent a letter out last Friday announcing a pause in our public worship. I was not the first bishop to do that. The Roman Catholics in South Australia did it on Thursday. All the Anglican Dioceses in New South Wales have paused public worship. The Diocese of Brisbane and Tasmania have done the same. Even the Church of England has stopped public worship as part of an attempt to slow down the rate of infection. These are extraordinary times. People are being encouraged to stay at home, to not go to crowded places, all as an attempt to slow the spread of the virus because we haven't got the capacity to treat all the people if we have major outbreak suddenly. And all this makes people anxious. It makes me a bit anxious I have to say. I can feel it in my chest. And that's ok. Having feelings is part of being human. Feeling anxious and uncertain is part of being human too. And being a Christian doesn't inoculate against that anymore than being a Christian inoculates us against catching COVID 19.

But there is something more to this story. Christians are people who have seen something in Jesus. Who have seen light and truth and life. As Christians we can see that God is trustworthy, especially when we are anxious.

The letter to the Philippians has some great advice: From Philippians 4.6-7:

*Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

It's natural to be anxious. But to worry is to continue to be anxious. To hold on to the anxiety, like a dog worrying a bone. One of the things we can see as Christians is that God is trustworthy and so we can react to our anxiety by deciding to trust. To put the words from Philippians into action: praying-giving our requests to God, and giving thanks. And as we do that, as we leave things with God, we will experience Gods peace.

This is not something just to make us feel better. I don't know how it is with you but when I am feeling anxious I tend not to be at my most creative or patient. I tend not to be so receptive to promptings from God, because I am occupied by anxiety. One of the things that Gods' peace does is it enables me to be open to God and therefore able to serve God more effectively. Having Gods peace isn't just about us, it's about being in a better situation to serve God as well.

There isn't much doubt that we are in for a very bumpy ride over the next few months. But we can take heart. We know the God who made the world and everything in it. We know the God who loves the world so much that he came among us to live our life to experience our pain and to die for us on the cross. We know the fact of the resurrection of Jesus which has sounded the death knell for all that is evil and wrong in the world. We know the God whose kingdom will come, and not even coronavirus can stop it.

We have seen the truth of God in our lives and the lives of others and so we trust God, we pray, and we give thanks, and receive Gods peace so we might continue to serve, whatever that might look like.

May we be more and more, people who see the reality of God and help others to do the same. Amen.