

¹ The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;^[a]

³ he restores my soul.^[b]
He leads me in right paths^[c]
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,^[d]
I fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely^[e] goodness and mercy^[f] shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.^[g]

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, ⁹ for the fruit of the light^[a] is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

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

³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We^[a] must work the works of him who sent me^[b] while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.” ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰ His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already

Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus^[e] to be the Messiah^[d] would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

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. ³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.”

⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

Rev'd John Shoaf — Sermon — 19 March 2023

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Today's reading from John might almost make us despair of ever convincing a non-believer of the truth of Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Jesus heals a man who had been blind from birth. The man himself is certainly converted — no problem there! He was blind, and now he sees. But when we look at the other characters who encounter Jesus and the healed man, we find a wide range of belief, tradition, and very human surprise and misunderstanding. This story, full of wonderful detail, is one the most fully realised stories in any Gospel. The people are real — and their types may be seen today. Let's look at each in turn and see what we make of them.

First, we have Jesus's disciples. They were walking along with Jesus when they came to the man born blind, sitting and begging by the road, trying to get a little money to live on. Seeing his blindness, they immediately apply the teaching of the Jewish priests: since he has a deformity, his blindness, he must have sinned, and God has punished him. Or perhaps his parents sinned, for the Jews believed that a baby in the womb may be guilty of any sin committed by the pregnant mother, and this man was born blind. So by the standards of their day and the teaching of the synagogue, there must have been some sin committed to account for his blindness. But Jesus rejects this reasoning, and ascribes the man's blindness simply to God, who made him that way for a purpose. It may be difficult to accept that God might have made the man blind simply so that Jesus could heal him; but we should be careful about focusing on that explanation alone. Jesus is not teaching, in this moment, about the ways of God, which are not our ways; he is only

refuting the automatic assumption that an unfortunate person must be a sinner. Nevertheless, this assumption persists today. Many of us, sometimes unconsciously, think, “If I do something wrong, God will punish me.” God may and will judge us, and may assign consequences to our actions; but that is up to God. We cannot know God’s thoughts or God’s reasoning in this world. Our best path is to follow, as closely as we can, our Lord Jesus, and live our lives in accordance with God’s ways, leaving the rest up to our Maker.

Next, there are some neighbours nearby, who see the man returning from the Pool of Siloam and notice that he can now see, presumably because he walked confidently, not in the manner of a blind man. They, ironically, have trouble believing their own eyes: “Is this the man?” “No, it only looks like him.” “I am the man!” They are naturally skeptical; this kind of thing doesn’t happen every day. When the man explains how Jesus did it, we might expect the Tui response: yeah, right. Apparently the explanation the man gives is reasonable enough; the neighbours only want to know where Jesus is. But note their difficulty in believing; were the man not standing in front of them and obviously using his eyes, what would be their reaction then?

And then we have some Pharisees, who examine this man who had been blind. The man explains again how Jesus had done it. Their first response is to be offended that this healing was done on the Sabbath. We have certainly met with the Pharisees’ insistence on the letter of the law before. They immediately assume Jesus is a sinner; but they doubt the whole story, until they talk to the man’s parents, who identify their son, but make no claim to know how it happened, referring the Pharisees to the man himself. These

Pharisees are keepers of the status quo, and unable or at least very unwilling to accept anything that challenges their knowledge of God and the way the world works. We may ascribe this to the fear of losing their positions and the respect of the common people; but that is not necessarily the reason for their attack on this man and on Jesus. It is a very common thing for people to resist new ideas, and to invest themselves so thoroughly in a worldview that any other view becomes, quite literally, unthinkable. Their reaction is then to reject the new idea without even giving it a hearing.

In this story we have met varying shades and styles of disbelief, from simple surprise to scandalised rejection. We know from our reading of the Gospels that Jesus met up with these sorts of reactions every day. And these are not the only kinds of disbelief the man, and Jesus, might have encountered. There are people who don’t think for themselves at all, and only have received opinions from others. (We must be careful ourselves not to conceive our faith in that way.) There are people who want to believe, but get bogged down in the details of faith, to the point where it all becomes too much trouble — as with the little differences in doctrine which divide us as Christians. There are people who truly could believe, and are on the threshold of commitment, but don’t realise that they have to make the final step themselves of choosing God. They want it all done for them. There are people who choose to believe, but with conditions — they don’t give themselves fully to God, and in time will fall away, because God doesn’t meet their particular criteria.

But besides being skeptical and rejecting the evidence of their own eyes, these doubters are really throwing away something very

precious. Jesus came into the world to bring light to his people. That light is metaphorical as well as actual and physical. It is the light of understanding, of knowledge and of faith. The blind man believes in Jesus, and so receives vision in two ways: the vision of the people and objects around him, and the vision of the true nature of Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus uses the name, “the Son of Man,” which emphasises that he was in fact born of a human woman, and is sent to humankind to bring them back to his father. To his credit, the man says, “Lord, I believe.” He has seen the light, the light of truth and understanding.

And we may say that all light comes from God. Satan is sometimes referred to as the “Prince of Darkness,” for he is the opposite of God, taking away people’s clear vision of right and wrong and leading them in darkness as his prisoners, shut away from God’s light. There is no light in Satan, but there is light in us, who have received the Spirit of Christ.

Light brings us life, love, and understanding. And what else does the light bring us? Well, the light of the sun, the solar star that is, brings us all this you see here — the bounty of God’s earth — fruits, vegetables, grain and all things that grow here on these beautiful islands. When we give thanks to God for the produce of the earth, and for the farmers and gardeners who grow it, we give thanks for the light of life. As Paul says, “Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true” (Ephesians 5:8-9). He also says, “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness” (5:11), for they lead only to despair and separation from God. But rejoice in God’s love and generosity, which has brought us the harvest we are so thankful for. In Jesus’ name. Amen.