

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

A lady is walking down the street to work and she sees a parrot in a pet shop. The parrot says to her, "Hey lady, you are really ugly." Well, the lady is furious! And she storms past the shop to her work. On the way home she saw the same parrot in the window and the parrot said to her, "Hey lady, you are really ugly." Well, she was incredibly annoyed now. The next day she saw the same parrot and the parrot said to her, "Hey lady, you are really ugly." The lady was so upset that she went into the shop and said that she would sue the shop and kill the bird. The shop manager said, "That's not good." and promised it wouldn't say that again. When the lady walked past the shop after work the parrot said to her, "Hey lady." She paused and said, "Yes?" and the bird said, "You know."

Well, let's call it judging a book by its cover. I am afraid it is a common human trait. And the Prophet Samuel was no exception. When he was sent to Jesse the Bethlehemite to find a new king for Israel, he looked first at the outward appearances of Jesse's sons. He thought that the Lord would choose someone tall and handsome, "but the Lord looks on the heart," and chose among Jesse's sons the youngest who was keeping the sheep.

At the time Samuel went to anoint David, there was trouble brewing in the country. Saul had been disobeying the Lord. And the people had begun to grumble: What was happening? What had happened to righteousness? Where was the Lord? Had God disappeared from their world? But the thing was, the Lord had already set Samuel to work, so that there could be new hope! Amidst his people's suffering, God had been working! It's only that most people have but a superficial grasp of events. If only we could keep our eyes wide open, we would be able to see that God is acting for his people step by step.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus healed a man born blind. For the disciples, it was a theological conundrum: why was the man suffering? What caused the suffering? Jesus led them to see that the man was suffering simply because he could not see. And so, Jesus healed him, using a very special method. The man did not doubt Jesus' instructions, but did exactly what he was told to do.

When the man's neighbours saw that he could see, they brought him to the religious authority in the community – the Pharisees. The man's parents were also there. Everyone was perplexed. They figured that if someone had the power to heal a man born blind, then that power must have come from God; yet it happened on a Sabbath, which contravened the Law set by God! They were greatly confused. Instead of sensing what really mattered and rejoicing with the man, all they cared about were the rights and wrongs of the religious law.

During his interrogation, the former blind man found himself led step by step towards the conclusion that the man who healed him must be someone very special, a prophet, perhaps. How else could someone have such powers? Then, after he was driven out from the presence

of the Pharisees, Jesus found him and opened his spiritual eyes. Jesus asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." Realising that Jesus was more than a prophet, but was the one who brought him hope and light, he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped him.

We might wonder why Jesus did all that to open this man's eyes. After all, a single command from him could have sufficed! But according to John, Jesus went to all that trouble of making mud, spreading it on the man's eyes and making him go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Despite the seemingly ridiculous instructions made by Jesus, this man obeyed. There is a very important lesson here: only a newly created person can see God and his acts, whereas disobedience results in spiritual blindness. This man obeyed unquestioningly, and was able to see for the first time in his life! A newly created man. A re-created being. Using the old tradition that human was made from dust, Jesus used mud to make a new creation. Jesus demonstrated in an unforgettable way that for humans to regain their spiritual sight, they must have a good relationship with God; they must live a new life!

The meaning of suffering is more than a complex question. It is in fact a mystery. We can't understand suffering, unless we first understand God. We can't give a perfect answer to what suffering is, unless we can answer perfectly what God is; what God's plans are. Since we cannot provide an answer to the question of suffering, how then should we face it?

God wants us to keep our eyes open, not only as individuals, but also as a faith community, so that the Church can see as God sees. What do we, who worship together and share a common faith, perceive when we take a look at the outside world? Do we share a common vision? Do we see a discontented and disillusioned community? Do we see people making the same mistakes over and over again? Do we see that amidst the suffering souls, God is at work for them?

In this world of darkness and confusion, God wants us to see with our spiritual eyes that his light is shining, and that one day, this whole world will become a green pasture where all human can be at rest. During this transitional period, we as a faith community, we who call ourselves Christians, must not be led astray by outward appearances, but must be steadfast in our faith. We must turn our eyes from personal concerns to the concerns of others in this world.

When his disciples asked whether it was the blind man or his parents who had sinned, Jesus did not answer. Instead, he wanted them to see, with their minds' eyes, with their spiritual eyes, a suffering soul. And that this suffering soul needed God's grace, and God was acting for him. Even within suffering, God is working.

As we have prayed together earlier this morning, may the God of healing and sight grant us eyes of faith and heal all that blinds us. May he renew our vision so that we can see afresh all that he is doing, that we can offer ourselves for those who are suffering, even though what we can offer might not seem much. May we be God's new creation, that he may use us to lead people to his great light. Amen.