



Lent Week 4

THE NEW SHOFAR

If we do not witness Christ to the world

How will they ever come to know salvation

Who is Jesus? – We are asked again to answer this question

The evangelist continues with his theme: *who is Jesus for me and for the world?* These questions were of great importance for John's own Church, as they faced ridicule from the pagans and rejection by the Jews. In terms of our world today we might even want to add to these concerns – *and indifference from many Christians themselves*. However, this question has the power to bring about a life transforming moment for those who pursue the Gospel with honest intent. For John, it is not enough for us to sit with the faith into which we were born. We are asked to continue to grow in our faith and in the knowledge of our faith. Why? So that we can better serve the ever-changing world in which we live.

In our present story we see the way the question is tackled by different groups. The crowd find it simply too much for them to comprehend. Their "science" cannot make sense of it. They cannot understand how a blind man could now see. He had been *born blind* and he must have been a familiar figure as he sat around the Temple begging for alms and for food. It was the only way he could survive in the world at that time. They all knew him and knew his story and so it is not hard to appreciate their bewilderment...*is this the one...you know...the man who was blind at birth...?* John highlights their utter confusion as a part of his message.

There is always more to Jesus than we can ever know

The fullness of Jesus is not always apparent and is rarely blindingly obvious. Even miracles are not enough to convince people that Jesus is God's Son, our Messiah. Faith is a journey and this pilgrimage nature of faith is shown by the blind man. But faith needs to be fed, to grow and be open to new depths by the Spirit of God which is why John shapes the narrative in the way he does. The blind man begins by not even knowing the true identity of Jesus. He had not even seen his face. For him he is nothing other than *the man Jesus*. From there he proceeds to being able to acknowledge *the man Jesus was a prophet of God*, someone sent by God to bring a divine gift to Israel. It is not yet faith, but it is well along the way to believing. He is at least open to new possibilities and that openness is rewarded.

This is something that could never be said of the Pharisees. They think they know Jesus, that they have him sorted out and there is nothing more to know! This closed mind approach meant they were prepared to go to any lengths to get rid of Jesus from the earth and from the hearts and minds of the people. For them he is dangerous. He is a threat to

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their own positions and to the stability of Judaism. It would be better for all of them if he could be executed.

They are not even willing to accept what everyone else was prepared to acknowledge: a miracle had taken place. A blind man could now see. They had locked the door to any possibility of misreading God's will. There was nothing more to the Jesus they saw.

Somewhere in the mix of opinion is most likely where we find ourselves standing— hence we have John pushing the question *Who is Jesus for me/us?* The moment we decide we “know” Jesus, that there is nothing more to know or to do in our relationship, is the moment Jesus ceases to be alive for us. As we change and as our lives change; as the world in which we live is changed, so too the way Jesus reveals himself to us is being transformed. The difficulty is, it takes courage and faith to be open to this life-enhancing change. The warning in this narrative is seen in the Pharisees who cannot believe their understanding of Jesus was wrong.

Finally, there is the sceptical crowd. These are the ones caught between the two positions – faith and rejection of Jesus. These are the people around us. How are they to come to know Christ and live under the rule of God? The only way they can come to faith is through the Jesus we present to them, the Jesus made alive in society through the way we live and act. This is why it is so important to be like the blind man on his pilgrimage. We are called to be open to the Christ speaking to us in 2020 and not simply sit comfortably with the Christ into whom we were baptised all those years ago. It is not easy being his disciples.

all that is needed for evil to triumph is for good people to remain silent.

In Gospel terms, we Christians must take on some blame for the mess in which the world today. Most in our world simply do not know Christ. They are good people but have not had the chance to either accept or reject faith in the Lord. This is where we come under the scrutiny of God. Like Abram of old, we have been called and chosen in order that *the world may be blessed*. At his ascension into heaven, Jesus sent all disciples out into the world to bring the faith alive for all peoples. If they do not have a preacher, how will they come to believe? Who is going to “preach” the Good News if it is not us? Sin and darkness take hold in the world when we remain “silent”; when we fail to make the Good News alive, accessible and valuable to a world searching for a way to make meaning of their lives.

The present Corona virus is in some ways a useful “parable” for today. What we see in our supermarkets is clear evidence of rampant selfishness and uncertainty about the future. The “me” economy governing so much of the way people live has come to the fore. People worry about their health and fear dying. Others have built their future on the security of the stock-market and now they are seeing how fragile and illusive this is proving to be as a source of security for their future. That people fight in the aisles of Woolworths over toilet paper is an indication of just how much we need a better vision.

Jesus is not going to click his fingers and bring the pandemic to an end. Nor is he going to calm the stock-market and guarantee our retirement in the way we dream it should be. What

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we have for the world is a certainty, a foundation, a source of security able to withstand any and all threats to our dignity as men and women created in the image of God and saved by Christ on the cross. This is our rock: nothing can take from us the supreme comfort and sure hope of a life lived in the loving embrace of God. Now let's go and reassure the world.

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