

WHY NOT NOW?

→ Years ago, if a person was unfortunate enough to have cataracts growing on their eyes, they were doomed to blindness. But as many of you in this congregation know from first hand experience, cataract surgery is now readily available and frequently performed to prevent that from happening and many other advances have been made in the treatment of conditions of the eye so that our sight is retained. We rejoice at and give thanks for the wonders of modern medicine through which God works to bring about healing.

..... The New Testament records at least seven occasions on which blind people were healed by Jesus and the passage that we have just heard from Mark's gospel records one of those events. It took place at Bethsaida and it was an occasion when the man being healed wasn't healed instantly but he had his sight restored through a more gradual process. I want us to use this story today to help us address this question "Why Not Now?" which is the theme of our worship this morning.

..... When we were thinking about the healing of the paralysed man last week we recognised that we do not always get the longings of our heart in answer to our prayers. But, we can have faith that God will always work his purpose out in any given situation or individual life and he will always meet the deepest need. But perhaps sometimes our question is not about why we don't get what we're hoping for but rather why we have to wait so long for what we're hoping for! What we are hoping for may come eventually but it can sometimes happen gradually and we wonder why we have to wait? Why not now, Lord?

→ In this story that we are concentrating on today, the man is touched three times by Jesus as he brings about a gradual restoration of the man's sight rather than an instantaneous healing. Let's look at each stage of the story so that we might grow in our understanding of just why we may sometimes have to wait for healing and wholeness to be ours or wait for it to come to those that we love and for whom we pray.

.....Right at the beginning of the story we find a similarity with the story that we focused on last week. Remember how in the story of the paralysed man it was his friends that brought him to Jesus. Well here we have a repeat of that action. Again it is other people who bring the blind man to Jesus. We're not sure if they are friends or members of his family who bring him, but whoever they are, they are keen for Jesus to touch the blind man. They believe that Jesus will be able to heal him and restore his sight and so they beg Jesus to do something, such is their longing and their desire for their companion to be healed.

.....And Jesus does do something, but it's not perhaps what the people that have brought the blind man to him expect him to do. The first touch that Jesus makes is to take the blind man by the hand and lead him outside of the town. Why would he do that? What was significant about this first move that Jesus makes and what can we learn from it today in terms of our understanding of the need to wait for healing and wholeness to come sometimes?

→ If you turn to Matthew 11 you can read these words, “The people in the towns where Jesus had performed most of his miracles did not turn from their sins, so he reproached those towns. How terrible it will be for you, Chorazin! How terrible for you too, Bethsaida! If the miracles which were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, the people there would long ago have put on sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on themselves, to show that they had turned from their sins!” The people of Bethsaida had become hard in their hearts. It wasn’t a place where people were necessarily open to Jesus or to what he might be able to do and so Jesus takes this man by the hand and leads him away from that environment in order to gently encourage him and help him to begin to trust that Jesus could change things.

.....Remember that this man can’t see who is talking to him or who is coming along side him and so Jesus touches him and leads him by the hand, lovingly, tenderly, gently, to a place where no one else could interrupt and get in the way of what was going on. This man who had spent many years living in darkness, possibly feeling very lonely and discouraged and isolated is now the centre of attention. In those moments no one else mattered to Jesus and he took the time to help the blind man understand that he was on his side and that there was something better than the experience of life that he had endured so far.

.....We live in a world where we want everything to be instant and so we create an impatient generation who may even scream at the microwave to “hurry up!” And perhaps we have even less patience with people. Jesus could have healed the man instantly I’m sure, just as he did in other situations, and maybe the blind man was impatient for that to happen, but Jesus took the time to help the blind man understand what was going on around him and to encourage him that placing his trust in Jesus to heal him was a good thing to do.

→ As we read on we then hear something that may, at first reading, seem rather unpleasant to us. But that’s perhaps because we read this story from our 21st century world with our obsessions about hygiene and our familiarity with modern medical techniques. Having someone spit in our eye would usually enrage us not make us think that they are about to do something wonderful that will change our life!

.....But, spit in the man’s eyes is what Mark says Jesus does before he places his hands on them and that wouldn’t necessarily have been surprising to the blind man at all. You see, people in the ancient world believed in the healing power of spittle, and maybe we’re no different today? What’s the first thing we do when we cut or burn our finger? Yes, many of us will put it in our mouth to ease the pain before we run for the cold water. So, Jesus was using a method that this man would understand and with which he would feel comfortable.

.....Jesus didn’t need to use spittle to heal the blind man but I’m sure it would have helped the blind man to be at ease as he felt that something was being done to him. Remember those words that we read in the book of James chapter 2, “Suppose there are brothers and sisters who need clothes and don’t have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them, “God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!” – if you don’t give them the necessities of life?” Often people begin to

experience the fullness of life that Jesus offers through the practical things that we do to express love and concern for them.

.....And then Jesus places his hands on the man's eyes and asks him if he can see anything. Yes, he can, but not clearly. He can see people but they look like trees walking he said. His sight is not yet fully restored but it's better than it was before. When God is at work in our lives, slowly bringing us to wholeness and to a closer relationship with him then we begin to see people and we begin to see situations and we begin to see issues much more clearly than before. We begin to see things as if through God's eyes. God's touch on our lives enlightens us and slowly we begin to change.

→ But God's desire is for us to be made completely whole, for us to experience fullness of life, and so he won't want us to stay in a place where his work in us isn't finished. In this story, seeing men as trees isn't good enough. So, Jesus touches the man again and this time he is able to see everything around him clearly. And of course, the fact that he can see clearly means that now he can walk around by himself, he doesn't constantly need the help of others, he can lead an independent life. He has been set free from the constant need to rely on others. He has been enabled through the touch of Jesus to live life in a new and more wonderful way. And everything that has happened in this story has been working towards this moment.

.....Notice too how Jesus tells the blind man not to go back to the village. We may think that a rather strange request. Wouldn't Jesus want him to go back to the people that know him so that he can tell them about what has happened and what Jesus has done? Wouldn't he have a great testimony to give and a great story to tell? But remember what Bethsaida was like! Full of hard hearted, cynical people! Maybe this is an encouragement from Jesus not to go back to the old environment, to the old way of life, but to live in the new way that is now possible because of the healing and wholeness that he has received

.....In this story, the healing of the blind man happened gradually rather than instantly and in our lives the process of healing or being made whole may sometimes take, days, weeks, months or even years, and in many senses God's work of making us completely whole is never finished, but all the time God is encouraging us, enlightening us and enabling us as we allow him to work in us by the power of his Spirit.

.....Maybe some of us here this morning are feeling somewhat impatient because our prayers aren't being answered? Maybe there is something in our own lives or in the life of someone that we care about where we want God to act now and bring about healing and wholeness and we haven't understood why it isn't happening in the way or the time that we expect? Consider the possibility that perhaps God is at work encouraging you to get to know him better, slowly opening your eyes to discover more about him, until the time comes when he knows that you are ready and able to receive the wholeness that he so longs to give you and to acknowledge that God himself is the source of that change in you.

→ Our God always knows what he is doing. He doesn't make mistakes. Those of you that were here last week or who have read or listened to the sermon on line will know that we affirmed then that we can always have faith that God will work out his purposes in us and his purposes are always good. So, surely, that also means that they are worth waiting for! And when and if we eventually receive what we have been longing for, we will undoubtedly discover that God has been slowly working towards that all along. Sometimes we simply haven't got our eyes open enough to see it. May we all always be open to God's encouraging, enlightening and enabling work in us as he gradually brings about healing and wholeness in us.