

4th Sunday in Lent 2020

Psalm 22 is that beautiful psalm which begins, "*The Lord is my shepherd*". In one place it says, "*If I should walk in the valley of darkness no evil would I fear*". We are, at present, making that journey down the valley of darkness that we call coronavirus. We do so, resolved to follow the directives of the Public Health Authorities, and conscious too that we are not alone, for as the Psalm says, "*You are there*", you, Lord, "*give me comfort*".

It is frequently said, "*Life is a journey*". Like all journeys there are choices as to how the journey can be made. Jesus offers to show us "*the way*". In the Gospel passage assigned to the 4th Sunday in Lent, the healing of a man born blind, we can observe three responses to Jesus' offer: that of the blind man himself; that of the Pharisees; and that of the blind man's parents. The real purpose of this Gospel passage is to enable each of us to reflect on our own life's journey.

The journey of the man born blind is from blindness to vision and finally to that spiritual insight we call faith. Like many journeys it is made by a series of steps; for the man born blind there were four steps.

After Jesus had restored the blind man's sight, the man, when questioned, knows only that "*the man called Jesus*" healed him. But after further questioning he comes to the conclusion that Jesus is "*a prophet*". Then after yet even more questioning he declares Jesus to be a man "*from God*". Finally, having encountered Jesus once again, who asks him point-blank, "*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*", the man professes, "*I do believe*".

He sees now not only with his eyes, but with his heart; he sees life in a completely new way. Perhaps each of us can think of a time when our traditional belief suddenly became truly a heart-felt faith. Often this happens when difficult decisions and circumstances test our faith in God - this may well be one of those times.

We now come to the response of the Pharisees. The Gospel shows us that an encounter with Jesus does not always lead to faith in Jesus. The journey the Pharisees travel is in the opposite direction of that of the blind man; they become more and more blind as their rejection of Jesus deepens. They reject Jesus because they believed he had violated the commandment

to keep holy the Sabbath day, as they understood it. The valuable insight here is that those who claim to know God's will, can all too easily become narrow minded, inflexible and intolerant. It is an error that Christians have made in the past, and one we too can make. Perhaps we should ask ourselves; *“What is it that Jesus seeks to do for me which I am resisting?”*

Finally, we come to the parents of the man born blind. At first their journey is not immediately obvious. They know the truth about their son; he was born blind and now he can see. But they refuse to say anything about what Jesus has done for their son out of fear of the Pharisees *“who had already agreed to expel from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus”*. In other words *“they sit on the fence”* and do not commit themselves to any opinion. *“Sitting on the fence”* can hardly be called a journey, but then we recall the words of Jesus: *“Whoever is not with me is against me”*. Being uncommitted, is in the end, to journey away from Jesus. Perhaps those parents represent those who nominally accept Jesus, but shy away from accepting the cost of following him. Such faith is hardly faith at all!

Undoubtedly, as we make our journey in faith, we will experience fatigue, and our courage may at times fail us. (Indeed, this may well be the case in the dark days ahead of us as we make our way through the coronavirus pandemic.) May the realisation that we are not alone lift us up and keep us going, for,

*“The Lord is my shepherd;
(he revives) my drooping spirit.
He guides me along the right path;
he is true to his name.” Amen.*