



## Lenten Devotional: Week 4

22 - 28 March

*Prepared by Elisabeth Benn*

### **Scripture:**

Last Sunday's Gospel Reading was taken from John Chapter 9, the story of the man born blind. I invite you to read the first passage now:

*As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' 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, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. (9:1-7)*

### **Reflection 1:**

As long as I can remember, I particularly liked this story of Jesus healing a long-term ill person. Why? It inspired my imagination! Let's take an imaginary journey: What was life like for the man born blind until Jesus passed by. His profession: beggar; his private life: still living with his parents; his status in society: at the very low end, a sinner. Illness was thought to be a punishment from God at this time – and is not as unusual today as one would like to think.

Let us try to experience how it must feel to be blind. You will need a cloth to use as a blindfold. Set a timer so that you allow 5 to 10 minutes of being blindfolded. After pondering the questions, sit quietly while blindfolded and imagine other tasks you do every day.

First, read the questions. Then put on the blindfold.

- Listen. What do you hear? Has this changed from before you put on the blindfold? Imagine the room where you are sitting. How far is next door? Where is the table, where the TV?
- Imagine walking to the kitchen to prepare a cup of tea and have a simple breakfast. How do you pour hot water into your mug without spilling it everywhere or burning your hands?
- Can you bring the mug and plate back to the table safely?

After you take the blindfold off, consider this:

There are approximately 36 million people who are completely blind, about 217 Million people with impaired vision and 89% of all of them are living in poor countries. What if you were one of them? Who would support you? How do you think, you would adapt to it? With a lot of anger, bitterness, sorrow? Or would you cope with the challenge?

### **Prayer 1:**

*We pray: Lord, we come to you to pray for all those who are blind, either from birth or later in life. We pray for all who live with vision impairments or may be threatened by progressively becoming blind. Strengthen their bodies and minds as they struggle with what complicates their daily lives. Give them patience with themselves and others and grant them a spirit of determination to live their lives to the fullest despite their lack of eyesight. We also ask you to give all sighted people sensitivity to the needs of others, not to subject blind people to pity or awkwardness, but to relate to them with respect. Amen*

### **Reflection 2:**

The man born blind saw his own hands and the water of the pool of Siloam first. Jesus was nowhere near him. A multitude of pictures were added to the sounds and smells he already knew – an overwhelming experience. He was asked several times how this had happened, and he reported by just citing the facts:

“He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” As if it had been that easy!

He had overheard what Jesus said to his disciples about the reason he had been born blind. In the past, he had heard many people discuss this. But Jesus had a completely new explanation -

“Sin is not the cause, but God wants to reveal His work through him!” Was this already enough for the man to trust Jesus?

This story is dear to me for another reason. It is that I find this man so fascinating! He is a wonderful example of a person who lived his life to the fullest despite being born blind. Read what he replied when he was interrogated by neighbors and the Pharisees (\*see below). His answers are concise, and he dares to question their reasoning.

Theologians say that the gospel of John presents negative images of the Jewish leadership in Jesus’s time. Sometimes the focus is on their attitudes, rather than on the man whom Jesus healed. I want to focus on the answers and the behavior of the healed man. He is resilient.

Over the last few years, resilience has become an important topic in psychotherapy. It implies that a person who has experienced much hardship or even trauma, can become a strong, joyful person, someone who takes difficulties in life as opportunities for growth.

All of us were born with a different degree of resilience. We decide either to let it wither or to enhance it. I hear the man born blind saying: Enhance it so that miracles can happen!

### **Prayer 2:**

Gracious God, these days we are experiencing a way of life and a threat to life that was unimaginable for us even a week ago. For some it is hard to adapt to it. Uncertainty and fear may become overwhelming. Remind us daily, hourly, that Jesus has given us “sight”, in our very beings, like the man born blind. Help us to trust him, to rest in the knowledge that we are not alone, that we too have resilience and strength to share.

### **Proposals for devotionals:**

- Two proposals you’ve read already in the text above. Reflect on your own resilience and how it relates to your faith.
- Think of people who have become role-models for you. What has made them special for you, so you chose them as your role-model?

### **Proposals for devotionals with children:**

- The above exercise with blindfolded eyes can easily be adapted to do with children. Which toys or games are difficult to play with without seeing the toys?
- There are restaurants where they serve ‘dinner in the dark’. You could try having a meal with blindfolded eyes and everybody guesses what he or she is eating.
- Discuss with your children what kind of person they would choose as their role-model and why.

**\*More of the story – the reactions of others to the healing of the man born blind:**

*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?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' 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.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'*

*They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 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.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. 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.' 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 and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 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.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore, his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.' 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.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' 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?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out. (John 9:8-34)*