

The underlying question in the gospel this morning is “What went wrong? In a world of cause and effect, who is to blame for this man’s blindness?” Time and time again I encounter the same question from people in the midst of a tragedy or season of suffering, “What did I do wrong?”

The themes of light and darkness, sight and blindness, belief and unbelief are strong themes in the gospel of John.

When the water is turned to wine in Cana of Galilee, the disciples “*saw* his glory and believed in him.” Nicodemus comes to Jesus by *night* to be able to *see* clearly. The Samaritan woman runs back home to exclaim, “come to *see* a man who told me everything I have ever done.” Thomas says, “until I *see* the marks in his hands I will not believe.”



The story of the blind man is one of the seven signs in the gospel of John, which are all accompanied by the seven great “I am” statements. So when Jesus restores the sight for the blind man, John will have Jesus say, “I am the light of the world.”

The other recurring theme in the gospel is testimony. John the Baptist says, “I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.” And a little later, “they believed his testimony.” Testimony is always measured, and still is, by two rules: whether it is credible and reliable.

So the extended narrative of the blind man is set up like a court room drama, in a way to prepare us for the largely unseen court room drama of the trial of Jesus. The purpose is to identify who is responsible for the blindness. Witnesses are brought in to testify: his friends, his parents, and finally the blind man himself. It is astonishing that a blind beggar, someone thought of as lacking in credibility or reliability, who you would never go to for a testimony, is finally brought in to bear witness to the action of restoring vision.

The result is that he is driven out of the community, much like Jesus will be driven out of the city after his trial.

In first century Palestine, whenever anyone is alienated from the community because of a disease or impurity, they are required to go to the priest, who will declare them “clean” before they can safely return to the community.

It is what happens to the ten lepers. “Go and show yourselves to the priest,” is the instruction. Nine of them do what they are instructed to do, knowing that this will be the agent for their restoration. One of them does not go to the priest, but impulsively returns to Jesus to give thanks when he realizes he is cleansed. In so doing, Jesus is set up in the critical role of the priest. Similarly here, Jesus goes out to meet the blind man and engages in a conversation with him that beautifully links the themes of light and darkness, seeing and believing, and credible and reliable testimony.

Jesus asks “Do you believe in (*or see*) the Son of God?”

“Who is he, sir? Tell me (*or testify to me*) that I may believe in him.”

Jesus says the most extraordinary thing, “You have *seen* him, and the one speaking (*or testifying*) to you is he.” The man replies, “Lord, I believe (*I see*).”

The same thing will happen in the resurrection appearances. While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene runs back to the others to testify, “I have *seen* the Lord!” Thomas sees and believes to testify, “My Lord and my God!” After Jesus breathes his last on the cross, the roman centurion, of all people,

looks up (*he sees*) and testifies, “Truly, this was the Messiah.”

St Paul describes the experience: “Once you were in darkness, but now in the Lord you are light.” Therefore, go and testify.

The question of blame is never assigned, but rather it is dissolved. This man, nor his parents, did nothing *wrong*. Similarly Jesus did nothing wrong. They all become vehicles to display the glory of God.

The fourth Sunday of Lent things are lighter in tone. It is intended to be a little bit of a refreshment before we enter into Passion-tide. Historically it was a time to remember where we were baptized, where the faith was first born in us, where we first “saw.” And we pray for those who testified to us and for the place it happened. We understand today to be “Mothering Sunday” from the text: “Jerusalem is the mother of us all.” Understanding that our faith is rooted in the events that will unfold in Jerusalem during Holy Week and Easter, we echo the words of the blind man, the Samaritan woman, Simon Peter, Mary Magdalene and Thomas by saying, “Lord, I believe.” I see.