Man born Blind

John 9:1-12

St Francis 17th May 2015 7pm Healing service

I recently got through the door a leaflet saying how the council is going to be replacing the street lighting in our area.

Apparently we are getting low energy LED lights which are white instead of orange and will be much cheaper to run. Approximately 42,000 lights are being replaced over the next few years and we should have improved road safety and lower crime, so they say! Darkness will be kept at bay. I just hope they are better than my low energy lights which take an age to turn on and make you look 10 years older!

Someone who lived in the darkness all his life was the man born blind who we heard about in our reading. He was sitting by the roadside minding his own business when the disciples decided to use his condition as a theological debating point. Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins? Who or what is to blame for sickness or malady?

It’s still a relevant question today. Recently there was a piece of research which said that 40% of cancers were caused by lifestyle factor such as smoking, obesity, poor diet, etc. The media likes to blame us for not living healthily enough, and often we feel we can’t live up to the ideal. Even they bring our parents into it: obesity in kids is set in stone by poor parenting practices, so we are led to believe.

However, we can see it the other way round too: if 40% of cancers are caused by lifestyle factors that mean 60%, the majority, are caused by other things, out of our control! Things that just happen!

And that is essentially Jesus’ answer too.

**3**“It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,” Jesus answered. “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.

Jesus is saying that the traditional judgemental apportioning of blame is not correct. It wasn’t anything to do with sin or punishment. I think it meant that God allowed it to happen as an opportunity for his power to be demonstrated, for the light to punch through the darkness and bring a glow of glory to an ordinary, unremarkable, human being, neither a great saint nor a great sinner.

We live in a fallen or broken world where sickness is a factor, where it seemingly strikes the righteous and unrighteous alike. Jesus is clear – it is not a sign of God’s judgement, it is a sign of God’s power.

Many of you know Andy Stranack who is a local councillor and member of Jubilee church. He was born with cerebral palsy after being starved of oxygen in the womb. Neither he or his twin brother were expected to survive the night. They both did, but then he was told he would never walk. When he was 3 or 4. Andy describes how he heard an audible voice saying, “stick with me and you will walk”. He never thought it was unusual to hear the voice of God. Five years later he did!

In 2013 he was diagnosed with stage 2 bowel cancer. The hospital operated on him immediately, but there was a leak in his bowel. For a while it was touch and go but lots of people prayed and the leak stopped of its own accord. Andy said that he had an amazing sense of God’s presence around his hospital bed. Praise God.

He definitely felt that God’s power was shown through this adversity and even one of the young people he mentors became a Christian at Andy’s bedside! You can read the whole story in a chapter in a book called when faith gets shaken.

One of the things that is very clear from Andy’s story is not that God necessarily engineers every situation but that God can use even the darkest situation for his glory. And that is exactly what Jesus says in the story of the man born blind – that God wants opportunities to show his mercy and power.

Verse 4 is a key verse:

**4**As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.**5**While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

What are the “works of him who sent me”?

The works were to usher in the kingdom of God, through enacting signs which show it is on its way. These included the great miracles of Jesus, the standing up for justice of the poor and needy and of course the healings too. And each of those signs, each of those works brings a little bit of light into the world. Each of those signs points to something bigger that is yet to come, that is still over the horizon. That’s what we believe.

At the last healing service we had two definite healings – Caroline who had tingling down her left hand side, which completely went, and a man called Jimmy, a Muslim, had his thumbs healed. You may have heard them testify about it church a while ago. A couple of weeks ago, Jimmy ended up in hospital for something completely different and I went to see him. Jimmy started chatting to the nurse and telling her she ought to visit our church, St Francis. She said she was a Hindu, but then she told us how she had seen Jesus in a dream and also how a famous RC priest called Padre Pio came to her in a dream to warn her how her 9 yr old son was going to have an accident but was going to be ok. Sure enough the next day she had call to say her son had been knocked off a bike. He was injured but survived and now he is 19 yrs old. A Muslim man, healed in a Christian church, witnessing to a Hindu who is telling us about a Catholic Saint, and all recognising the name of Jesus. Isn’t God good? You couldn’t make it up!

I believe God heals today. I believe want to heal right now. Each of those healings is of course an amazing thing in its own right, but also points to a greater reality, a greater kingdom which is on its way.

It reminds me of a sermon many years ago which quoted a poem by R L Stevenson:

*My tea is nearly ready and the sun has left the sky;*

*It’s time to take the window to see Leerie going by;*

*For every night at teatime and before you take your seat,*

*With lantern and with ladder he comes posting up the street.*

*Now Tom would be a driver and Maria go to sea,*

*And my papa’s a banker and as rich as he can be;*

*But I, when I am stronger and can choose what I’m to do,*

*Oh Leerie, I’ll go round at night and light the lamps with you!*

The lamplighter lights up the lamps which punch little holes in the darkness. Holes of light which bring hope, which bring encouragement, which bring strength. That is what we do when we pray for healing. That is what we do when we pray for blessing. That is what we doing when we pray in Jesus Name. So tonight I urge you to come forward and receive what God has in store for you – don’t be scared, just trust him and he will do it!