**SEVEN QUESTIONS**

**Week of Monday 16th March 2020**

Opening: Think of a moment when you were made particularly aware of light and dark, of seeing and not seeing. It could be a time you went camping and saw clear stars under the dark night sky, or the time you entered a cave.

Read: The gospel passage from this week’s lectionary is John 9: 1-42.

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1. John 9: 1-42 is a long but beautiful story of a man healed from blindness. It is interesting as Jesus instructs the man to ‘go wash in the pools of Siloam’ (as the text reminds us, Siloam means ‘Sent’). What does Jesus’ call to action of the man born blind tell us about the healing of Jesus and our role in it?
2. Most of the story revolves around the post-healing investigation and enquiry. The Pharisees complain about the healing taking place on a Sabbath. Some see this as reason enough to dismiss Jesus’ credentials. It ties in with gospel teachings elsewhere: Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath (Mark 2: 27). Using the practice of Sabbath-keeping as an example, ask the question: When are religious ritual, faith practice, and discipline helpful? When do they become unhelpful?
3. Interestingly, the healing of the blind man brings pressure upon him and his family. Mom and dad, in this instance, seem keen to distance themselves from the whole affair. What lesson is there in recognizing that our healing - or to put it differently, our direct experience of Jesus – brings us into conflict with the powers that be?
4. One of the things I love about this story is the chutzpah of the man born blind. He is no passive observer, not someone simply willing to accept the healing and take his place in the audience. No! He responds with some witty dialogue to the badgering complaints of the religious leaders. ‘I was blind, but now I see’, is his refrain. Can you recall a moment in your life when you had an experience of God? A moment of revelation?
5. Of course, blindness carries substantial symbolic value too. Some commentators believe this is the cross-over point in the whole gospel. Many people, like the blind man, physically healed, are awakened to the reality of Jesus – their eyes opened. Others, intent on protecting power and influence, threatened by Jesus’ boundless love, are increasingly blind to him. In what ways are people blind to the presence of God? What are the causes of this blindness?
6. In what ways are people’s eyes opened to God? Think over the stories of miracle-healing in the gospels, and of people coming to faith in Jesus. Can you see any trends or commonalities among those whose eyes are opened?
7. These times are difficult for us. I write this in the shadow of the Coronavirus outbreak. Drawing on the metaphor of blindness and seeing (or awakening), in what ways is this virus challenging us? In what ways is it pointing to our blindness? In what ways is it giving new (in)sight?

**Prayer**. We pray for all those suffering the effects of Coronavirus. We pray for families who have lost loved ones. We pray for the recently diagnosed. We lift to God, praying for protection and safety, for those fighting on the frontlines of the virus. We give God thanks for the genuine care, and concern people are showing for each other. Ask God to reveal ways in which we might be used to aid and assist others in this time of need.

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