

Gospel of John chapter 9, verses 1 – 41 – The Man born Blind:-

This is the third 'episode' of the four encounters of the Lord Jesus with individuals covered on these 'Sundays in Lent'. The reading this week is often missed in church because of Mothering Sunday.

Lent 2: Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3.1–17) - Lent 3: The woman of Samaria (John 4.5–42) - Lent 4: The man born blind (John 9.1–41) - Lent 5: The raising of Lazarus (John 11.1–45)

Scene A (1–7): Jesus, the disciples and the blind man:- Then, as in some cases now, sickness or disability was understood to be caused by the sin of the individual. Notice that the Lord Jesus does not apportion blame but looks to the future healing (verse 3). Remember that Jesus is the light of the world! *"This is the judgment: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil"*. (John 3.19). This healing can be seen as an example of a person who walked in the darkness of blindness coming into the light as he is given sight. In John 12.46, Jesus is clear that all those who believe in him continue to walk in the light, even if surrounded by darkness in the world around.

In verse 7, the physical removal of the clay by washing was an act of obedience, compare with the healing of Naaman in 2 Kings chapter 5.

Scene B (8–12): the man and his neighbours:- The first witnesses of this healing were those in daily contact with the man. The man witnessed immediately to Jesus as the source of his healing. The 'neighbours', obviously unsatisfied with his replies appeal to their local religious authorities, the Pharisees.

Scene C (13–17): the man and the Pharisees:- There had already been a division among the people about the teaching and miracles performed by the Lord Jesus (see John chapter 7, verse 12). Here the Pharisees immediately point to the breaking of the Sabbath Law as a means of accusing the Lord Jesus of being a sinner and incapable of performing miracles. The man again witnesses to what he believes. Jesus must be a prophet.

Scene D (18 – 23): the parents and the Pharisees:- The parents would be able to confirm that this was their son and that he had been born blind – a tragedy for a working class family, all that he could do was to beg for a living. These parents were afraid of the isolating effects of being put out of the synagogue (verse 22). The man was old enough to testify for himself.

Scene E (24–34): the man and the Pharisees:- The man's second encounter with the Pharisees/Jews offer a stark contrast to the ambivalent and evasive response of his parents. Under the increasing pressure of the interrogation, the man simply repeats his testimony: *'One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.'* In response to the logic of his argument ('If he were not from God, he could not do such things') they are reduced to *ad hominem* personal attack.

The word for ejection from the synagogue was a technical term, akin to excommunication from the Catholic Church, in fact, the first century Jewish synagogue was more of a community than a religious institution, and the main significance is that the man has been excluded from the community, from its relationships and support, and is thereby publicly shamed.

Scene F (35–41): Jesus and the Man and Jesus and the Pharisees:- In response to his ejection by the Pharisees/Jews, he is embraced by Jesus. Jesus hears of the man's fate and seeks him out; having invited him to receive healing in their first encounter, he now invites him into the discipleship of faith. Jesus' final sayings, at first apparently directed to the man, but then sliding into a final dialogue with Pharisees, combines the language of judgement between light and darkness that we saw earlier, this time expressed in the parallel terms of sight and blindness, with the language Jesus uses in quoting Isaiah 6.9–10 in relation to his teaching in parables (Mark 4.17). Though he has come to save the world (John 3.16) his presence and the sharing of the Good News about him will always be divisive since it demands a response—

The world is divided between those who respond positively, and those who respond negatively. On which side of the debate would you be?