

A Lent 4

26th March 17

Place: St Mary's

I Sam 16.1-13

Theme: What can you see? John 9.1-41

- ◆ What can you see?
- ◆ Can you see God?
- ◆ Can you see what God is doing in Wimbledon, here in St Mary's?
- ◆ Many of the healing miracles performed by Jesus have their precedents in the great prophets of the Old Testament, especially Elijah and Elisha. They would have been interpreted by the people around Jesus as signs of God's presence with them and of a continuity in God's saving work among them. There are no previous stories of the healing of blind people in the pages of the Old Testament. When Jesus heals the blind, something that he seems to have done on a number of occasions, we are shown that God is doing something new in Jesus. Something that has never been done before.
- ◆ Healing the blind is a wonderful and amazing thing, something we perhaps take a little for granted in these days of cataract operations and spectacles. However the significance of this story is far greater than just the hope that if we lose our sight it might be restored again.
- ◆ None of us can see God? The man in the story is born blind; but so are all of us spiritually.
- ◆ All of us want to know what is going on.

- ◆ Most of us want to understand the world and use that understanding to take control of our lives.
- ◆ None of us like it when things happen that we don't understand and can't explain.
- ◆ The terrible attack on Parliament this week has demonstrated that again. We cannot understand why someone would want to do something so hateful and self destructive. Thousands of words have been used to try and explain why it happened, but none of us know for sure and none of us know what to do to stop it happening again. We don't like that sense of not knowing and not being in control, so we come up with all sorts of theories and ideas.
- ◆ What is interesting is that this human tendency to explain away the things we don't understand is just as much there when something unexpectedly wonderful happens as when something unexpectedly terrible does. In today's gospel a man is healed of blindness, but John shows us how many people respond to that wonderful news by trying to explain it away.
- ◆ The man's neighbours think that it is not the same man who was blind, but just someone who looks like him. Others find it equally hard to believe, but keep asking him questions.
- ◆ Some of the Pharisees are so confident that they know what God is like that they disregard the amazing and wonderful thing that has happened so that they can preserve their own world view

and ideas. Others start to wonder who Jesus is, but then fit him in with their pre-existing ideas and say he is a prophet.

- ◆ The Jewish authorities are even worse. They are so certain of their own understanding of God and the world that they try and prove the man wasn't blind by going to speak to his parents. When that doesn't give them the reassurance that their ideas are correct they turn on the man and his parents. They threaten the parents and exclude the man from the Synagogue; so that God's work cannot disturb their carefully worked out religious system. Their arrogance and desire to be in control leads them to exclude signs of the work of God among them.
- ◆ All of these people are asleep. All of them are dreaming that they can see and that they know and understand. A few of them are starting to wake up, to grapple with a reality that is different from their dreams. The neighbours who ask the blind man about Jesus are asking the right questions. The Pharisees who say that Jesus is a prophet are starting to wake up. The danger is that by categorising him as a prophet and fitting him into their system they will fall asleep again and fail to see the utterly new thing that God is doing in Jesus.
- ◆ It is the man who was born blind. The one person in the story who knows he is blind who is really waking up. He knows he cannot see so he

asks. Even after he has had his physical eyes opened; he has the humility to recognise that he still cannot see God. He too wants to work out what has happened to him so when Jesus comes to him asks. 'Who is he that I might believe in him?' When he is given the answer 'The one who is speaking to you is he' he answers 'I believe' and worships Jesus.

- ◆ Ironically it is the blind man who shows us the way to God. He shows us how to recognise what God is doing among us. He listens to Jesus, he does what he says, he trusts his own experience more than the religious authorities, he trusts Jesus and he asks for help to believe and understand. His faith comes before his understanding. His humility leads him to seeing and experiencing God's saving power.
- ◆ We need to be like him. While we sleep and dream of our own power and agency we will not be able to see God at work. Once we wake up, once we know our need for God and the inadequacy of our own faith, once we learn to see what is actually going on we will start to see where God is at work and that it is not as we thought. So let us open our eyes and see what God is doing among us. Let us open our hearts and minds to God so that God can show us the new things he is doing.