

## **The Blind Man**

Last week, I was woken up at 9 o'clock in the evening by loud giggling coming from upstairs. When I went up to investigate, I discovered five year old Stefan trying pointlessly to conceal his hysterical laughter, trying not to wake his brothers who were sleeping in the same room. When I asked him what he was laughing about, it took at least three attempts for him to communicate it to me. He was laughing at his sock carrot ! His sock carrot ! And then, still laughing hysterically, he produced a pair of socks which he had rolled neatly into a ball, and inserted into the pair of socks was an orange glow stick. And for some reason, he had decided that this was his sock carrot – and I think I must just have looked confused, because he then turned to his super-hero voice and did a ventriloquist number, as the sock carrot declared ‘I am the light of the universe’. Well, having almost surrendered bladder control, we calmed down and I came away to realise that the Sock carrot had made claims more audacious than Jesus of Nazareth. I am the light of the universe !

The Gospel of John seems to be structured largely around seven so called definitive declarations : where Jesus says ‘I am the something or other. I am the Good shepherd, I am the gate, I am the vine and so on. And today’s reading is the explanation of Jesus’ claim I am the light of the world.

Just try to imagine : a pharisee in the city of Jerusalem is rather like a baptist minister in the city of London. You’re clearly some kind of religious leader, with recognition and a popular following. But you have absolutely no stake whatsoever in the establishment. But here we are, and reports come in that one of the revolutionary leaders who’s been wandering around Essex has the audacity to come into London to display his religious fares. And you hear that he has healed someone who has been blind from birth.

One of the most audacious and pompous mistakes of twentieth century westerners is to think that we are cleverer than people living two centuries ago. Sure, they may have been stupid enough to believe in miracle stories, but we have science on our side, so we know that miracles do not happen. That kind of thinking is just ridiculous. Everybody knows how the world works, and people in the first century, struggling to hack a living out of tough environment were not readily given to the kind of miracle stories reported in the Gospels. These were not stupid people.

So you hear of this builder from Nazareth performing a miracle of a man who is blind from birth. Now, if this is happening under your nose, and you believe that this is a dangerous man – if you were a responsible pharisee – or a responsible baptist minister – you would look into it. Because come on – the chances are, this is a big con and the sooner it is exposed the better. So John reports their research. They speak to the man, they speak to his parents, then they spoke again to the man.

Interestingly, the man does precisely what Jesus instructs his disciples to do : he simply lets his yes be yes and his no be no and refuses to repeat himself on the issue. Well, it seems that the Pharisees are unhappy with the outcome of their research. They have been unable to discount what took place, find themselves confronted with a strong theological argument put together by a former beggar, and finally have to resort to verbal abuse. In the end the blind man is excluded from the synagogue.

Well, we heard the whole reading. Jesus hears about this and goes in search of former blind man. And as he is affirming him, Jesus declares, *I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.*

This, it seems, is what it means to be the light of the world. At one level, light is a positive metaphor – it enables you to see. In this sense, the blind man has been enlightened ! But on the other hand, there is the more negative connotation : the idea of something being brought into the cold light of day. Light exposes the darkness of our lives, and can be searching and uncomfortable and painful. When Jesus describes himself as the light of the world he clearly is talking about light in both senses – and whether we welcome or recoil the light of the world seems to depend largely upon who we are. I have to say, I'm still with the pharisees : in the knowledge that confronted by Jesus, surely we would be exposed to his light in a way that is not altogether comfortable.

But the light that Jesus brings is the light of judgement as well as the light of life, and it is the same light that his disciples are called to reflect. In fact, this is the real meaning of the word for Glory – it means simply reflected light. That's why Jesus says, 'if I glorify myself my glory means nothing'. Jesus is simply reflecting who God is and drawing attention to that. And again, this is what the disciples themselves are called to reflect : let your light so shine before people that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father who is in heaven.

In fact, this is something of a theme running throughout Scripture. So from the Old Testament reading, we hear that Moses face was shining because he had been in the presence of God, shining to the extent that he had to put a veil over his face because it was distressing people ! And when we get to the New Testament, Paul writes to the Corinthian church to affirm their boldness : which is 'not like Moses who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, tho this very day when they hear the Old Covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it removed. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds ; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another, from one degree of Christ-reflectingness to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

IN fact, you remember Stephen, in Acts chapters 6 and 7, on trial for his life, accused of blasphemy – accused of rejecting the law of Moses. And he lifts his eyes to heaven and says look, the Son of Man standing at the right hand of the Father. And those watching, the pre-conversion apostle Paul included, say that Stephen's face was like the face of an angel. It was though God was giving him the same shining face that he gave to Moses when he received the law that Stephen is accused of denying. It was as though God was giving Stephen the divine seal of approval.

'As we gaze on your kingly brightness, so our faces display your likeness, ever changing from from glory to glory, mirrored here may our lives tell your story.' If Jesus is the light of the world, the light of liberty and the light of judgement, then that tells us an enormous amount about the role of the Christian Community.

But we don't generate this light by peddling our guts out on some pious or political dynamo machine. We simply look to Jesus, and find ourselves accidentally reflecting his glory, reflecting his light, probably without realising that this is what we are doing.

I suppose at this point we've reached another way of saying what was said this morning. That if we consciously try to do all the right things, biblically, piously, spiritually, liturgically, politically, it's all rather pointless if other things are not in place. The most effective way of making any kind of difference for the better in our lives, or in our world, is not by feats of super-human energy. It is by looking to this Jesus, so that we cannot help but reflect his glory.

Because to be sure, we all reflect something. Our lives are a testimony to the things that really are important to us, whether we like it or not. And if our lives are centred around the living Christ, then that inevitably has a real effect in the real world. I don't mean that we do the navel gazing thing, of being piously inward looking so that we become little more than Spiritual couch potatoes. If it really is Christ that we look to, then we cannot help but reflect something of his transforming character in our lives and in our world.

'Let your light so shine before people, that they may see your good deeds, and glorify your father who is in heaven.' The assumption is that there will be good deeds, but they are a reflection of God's character, not an attempt to please him or impress people.

As we gaze on your kingly brightness, so our faces display your likeness.

*Our Lord and Giver of life, lead your people beyond the laws and structures which too easily shape us, to the new life that liberates us. Where there is hopelessness, frustration and despair, bring your gifts of wholeness and liberty and life, in all its superabundance. Break through the darkness of death, and lead your people to live in the light.*

*We pray for governments which have the power and the responsibility to bring the light of justice, to places where darkness reigns. In the unspoken refugee crisis for the people of Iraq, in the unending torment for those in Darfur, in the countless hidden injustices that banish light from your beloved children – cause your church to take action as well as feel emotion, and governments to bring justice as well as talk of justice. Break through the darkness of death, and lead your people to live in the light.*

*Free us from the laws we create, but which fail to bring true freedom. Bring your children to the fullness of the life for which we have been created, that we might mediate your living truth, reflect your glorious light, and proclaim the new life for which all people have been born into this world – the world which you loved and gave yourself to save.*