

Blind Sighted

(A Sermon based on Psalm 23, John 9:1-41 in the midst of Covid 19, preached at Footscray Baptist Church by Rev Cheryl Williams on March 22nd, 2020)

What a week!

How are you feeling?

Today we were going to celebrate the Persian New Year but given the large number of deaths in Iran in the last couple of weeks our Persian congregation are not up to celebrating – we will pray for them and Iran in our prayer time.

In this week we have all been blind sighted, the reality of Covid19 has really started to hit, I think we all knew it was coming, but it has still come as a shock.

No doubt many of you are confused, anxious and fearful. Things are changing rapidly for us all and soon we won't be able to meet together physically to worship. Our lives are being turned upside down, we will have to become more creative in how we connect with each other. We will change the way we

worship as the body of Christ, but we will still worship together, even if it is in our homes and PJs.

Christians for millennia have had to change the ways and places in which they could worship – they have met in caves, in secret, they have been on the edge of society and feared for their very lives. And we will also adapt.

There is some normality though – Audrey my cat has no idea about the virus and still demands her meal at the appointed time. And last night Geelong was playing a footy match on TV – so some things don't change.

Today I was going to preach on the story of Jesus healing the blind man in John 9, I love that story, it is full of twists and turns. I was going to tell you the story about my Dad getting his retina reattached and how that gave him a new lease of life. I was going to tell you about how taking a blind man on outings and describing what I could see, relieved his

depression. I was going to tell you about how another client who was blind could still play hymns on his little organ and how we shed many tears as he played.

However, instead, I thought we might look at that story and our other reading from Psalm 23 and see what comfort and solace these words in Scripture might bring to us in this unsettling time.

So first to the story in John. A blind man, a vulnerable man surrounded by others wanting to use him to find out about whether disability is related to one of their parent's sinfulness. They all want to know why. Jesus however, doesn't enter into their discussion, he simply acts. He heals the man. He loves the blind man enough to do something about his situation, he doesn't look for someone to blame, he doesn't feel sorry for him, he doesn't judge, he simply does something about it. He acts with love and kindness.

Jesus is teaching us to do something about another's pain. In a twist, Jesus teaches us that blindness and brokenness isn't about disability, illness or even sinfulness, rather it is about, not being able to see beyond another's disability, illness or sinfulness. Blindness is when we keep defining others by their circumstances or what we perceive as their brokenness.

The blind man, initially not knowing who Jesus was or why he could heal, becomes pretty matter of fact with those who kept prying. He is able to put his faith in God.

It seems to me that the blind man experienced a little of what the Psalmist speaks in Psalm 23.

Jesus by healing him opens up a whole new world for me, he offers him a more peaceful existence, he offers rest from begging and living as an outsider, he offers him guidance along the right path as he puts his faith in God and finally some safety from the abuse of others. How and why – because he has learnt

that in Jesus his life can be filled to overflowing, his life has been restored. He has experienced that the love and kindness of God - shown to him by Jesus, and he knows it will stay with him.

We know this too don't we. We do not need to be blind-sighted. We know from whence our help comes. We know the one who provides us with solace and calm. We know the one who will give us comfort in our dark days.

This is what the Psalmist tells us. How providential that Psalm 23 is set as a reading for today. It is as if God knows ... This psalm has provided comfort for the grieving and those in dark places for thousands of years.

This Psalm we think is written by David, that young shepherd boy overlooked by his brothers, overlooked by many. As we read this Psalm we find somebody who feels a bit lost

and a bit alone – like many of us these last few weeks.

The psalm reminds us of what God is like. When we feel vulnerable God will comfort us. When we feel lost God will guide us. When we feel like we are in a dark and scary place, God is there with us.

Let us take up this invitation from our God:

Let God lead us to green pastures and still waters as we find ways to relax.

Allow God to take our hand as we reach out to him in this dark valley and as we reach out to others.

May I conclude with a prayer for the world at this time, from the United Church in Canada

Prayer:

In this time of Covid19 we pray –

When we aren't sure, God help us to be calm;

When we information comes from all sides,
correct and not, help us to discern;

When fear makes it hard to breathe, and
anxiety seems to be the order of the day, slow
us down, God;

Help us to reach out with our hearts, when we
can't touch with our hands;

Help us to be socially connected, when we
have to be socially distant;

Help us to love as perfectly as we can, knowing
that perfect love casts out all fear.

For the doctors we pray,

For the nurses we pray,

For the technicians and the cleaners and the
aides and the caregivers we pray,

For the researchers and theorists, the
epidemiologists and investigators, for those
who are sick, and those who are grieving we
pray,

For all who are affected, all around the world ...

We pray for safety, for health, for wholeness.

May we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked and house those without homes;

May we walk with those who feel they are alone, and may we do all that we can to heal the sick – in spite of the epidemic, in spite of the fear.

Help us, O God, that we might help each other.

In the love of the Creator, in the name of the Healer, in the life of the Holy Spirit that is in all and with all, we pray may it be so. Amen..¹

Let God enfold you in love as you stay calm, be clean and be kind. Amen.

¹ A prayer during times of COVID-19 by the Right Rev. Richard Bott (United Church of Canada), originally posted on Facebook. Moderator Bott encourages the sharing of prayers he posts throughout his term.

