

Fourth Sunday in Lent 26th March 2017

[1 Samuel 16: 1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5: 8-14; John 9:1-41](#) from Vanderbilt

[Lent 4 A March 26 2017](#) Textweek

One line from each of the three readings we have heard today:

From 1 Samuel:

“the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

From Ephesians:

“once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light.”

And from John’s gospel:

“Then I went and washed and received my sight.”

Three lines from three readings that suggest a three word sermon: ‘open your eyes’; however for those of us that feel we already have our eyes open, we might want a little more, and today’s readings do offer much more.

Today’s readings set in the context of the fifth Sunday of Lent really do open up for us a new orientation. We have been in the wilderness looking, seeking and desiring to discover ourselves and seeking to encounter God; we have been in Lent for 26 days and so we’re over half way and perhaps now we’re also looking for a way out.

It is amazing how today’s reading’s echo the story of creation; and so too they echo, or illuminate a ‘Genesis’, a new beginning and a new creation that finds birth in the wilderness of Lent.

The Old Testament reading tells of anointing a new king, David, a new reign and a new rule, a new order of creation; and the beginning of the ‘house of David’, a house that the New Testament will identify as the ancestry of Christ.

The opening line of the reading from Ephesians echoes the opening lines of Genesis 1, the very first lines of the bible:

“1 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.”

And today’s Ephesian’s reading opens with:

“For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light.”

And we’re not looking back to a previous ‘genesis’ rather here in the wilderness of Lent we’re encountering a new beginning for ourselves.

And now with forty-one verses to consider, what do we discover in the reading from John’s gospel?

Many who first heard this story heard it as a miracle story, a telling of one of the wonderful things that Jesus accomplished; and for many it is still believed as just that. In which case we really need look no further, for it tells us that Jesus was much more able than us and more able than anyone we know.

However, John's gospel offers us the insight of an early mystic, it unwraps the teaching of Jesus so that we too might become followers of the Christ-like path; and to appreciate this mystical writing we need only look at the overall construction of the gospel itself.

John begins his gospel with the very words that Genesis begins "In the beginning" and the climax; the last words spoken by Christ on the cross, in John's gospel are "*It is finished*", and echo the completion of the Genesis creation story:

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ² And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done."

The first main section of the Gospel of John, following prologue of creation, is often referred to as the 'Book of Signs' and is so named as it contains seven notable events, often called "signs" or "miracles",

These seven signs are:

1. Changing water into wine at Cana in John 2:1-11 - "the first of the signs"
2. Healing the royal official's son in Capernaum in John 4:46-54
3. Healing the paralytic at Bethesda in John 5:1-15
4. Feeding the 5000 in John 6:5-14
5. Jesus walking on water in John 6:16-24
6. Healing the man blind from birth in John 9:1-7
7. The raising of Lazarus in John 11:1-45

The seven signs are seen by some scholars and theologians as evidence of new creation theology in the Gospel of John, the resurrection of Jesus being the implied eighth sign, indicating a week of creation and then a new creation beginning with the resurrection.

And so as we seek an orientation that will lead us out of the wilderness of Lent we are given one of these important signs, or theological insights to contemplate.

Initially John seeks to correct the existing paradigm that saw sin and sickness as linked together and so this is not so much a healing story as a story of recreation, it is not an account of making well or of bestowing forgiveness; rather it speaks of giving a new worldview, and so too a new outlook on life.

Jesus identifies himself to the blind man: "*I am the light of the world.*" and then we are given a new account of creation.

First listen again to the Genesis account:

"And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over

the night, and to separate the light from the darkness." and then we hear "the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being."

Now in John's gospel we have the Jesus, "*the light of the world*", who is seen to have "*spat on the ground and made mud*", as the activity of giving new life to the blind man.

John's inclusion of the mud-making draws us into contemplating the new creation that is brought to birth by having our eyes opened, by seeing in a new and creative way.

3

What is this eye-opening miracle illustrating for us; how can we be contemplating a new creation when we are comfortably set in our own pattern of life; and "the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight."

The insight of John's gospel, and it is very much insight, not eye-sight; is in discovering the reality that the man was "blind from birth".

In our culture we are brought up from birth to see what is, and over and over again we are given the right prescription of spectacles to ensure we see what we are supposed to see.

We have almost blindly accepted a version and vision of reality that has little to do with the sight that Jesus offered to the blind man.

That same new vision is offered to us and to all.

Life in city is very different to the wilderness; and our blindness from birth conforms to the city view; we acquire as much as we can in our early years and as we turn our eyes toward the grave we hang on to whatever we have until we die. The wilderness offers us a different looking glass, it is like a new womb for we enter the wilderness with nothing but ourselves; and what we discover is not a long-sighted squint at the cemetery, rather we see a new possibility; the possibility of creation that is not bounded by age and not bounded by our own smallness.

We open our eyes to the gift of life and to the giving of life as an endless possibility.

Two further lines stand out in the readings today: and the first is the action of the blind man; what does he do in order to receive sight?

"He went and washed and came back able to see"; he actually had to do the task that led to his re-creation; and that very action is now ritualised, and unrealised in the liturgical act of Holy Baptism.

We at our baptism were charged to "shine as a light in the world to the Glory of God"; and perhaps in Lent we confront the shining of ourselves.

That very same line of thought we find in Ephesians; it begins with "For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light"; notice we were not 'in the' darkness, we were the darkness, and we did not find ourselves 'in the' light, rather we become the light. And that short reading finishes with an exhortation;

"Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

The way out of the wilderness of Lent is the way into resurrection.

If you have the insight of non-self, if you have the insight of impermanence, you should make that insight into a concentration that you keep alive throughout the day. Then what you say, what you think, and what you do will then be in the light of that wisdom and you will avoid making mistakes and creating suffering. *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Peter Humphris