

Call to worship

Day by day, God leads us: to the deep, deep pools of peace,
to the green, lush lawns of grace.

Day by day, Jesus calls us: to pour out ourselves in service,
to anoint the stranger with hope.

Day by day, the Holy Spirit shows us: the community we could be,
the family we are called to become.

Hymn Sing to the Lord a joyful song R&S 77 (tune *Gonfalon Royal* at 136)

Sing to the Lord a joyful song,
lift up your hearts, your voices raise;
to us his gracious gifts belong,
to him our songs of love and praise.

For life and love, for rest and food,
for daily help and nightly care,
sing to the Lord, for he is good,
and praise his name, for it is fair.

For strength to those who on him wait
his truth to prove, his will to do,

praise ye our God, for he is great,
trust in his name, for it is true.

For joys untold, that from above
cheer those who love his sweet employ,
sing to our God, for he is love;
exalt his name, for it is joy.

Sing to the Lord of heaven and earth,
whom angels serve and saints adore,
the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
to whom be praise for evermore.

J.S.B. Monsell

Children's Time – Mothering Sunday, give out posies

Gifts + Lent coin collection

We have the means to give, we have the reason to give,
and there are many waiting for us to give.

Yet often, our hands hold back, and we hoard what we have for ourselves.

God of grace, help us to live and give in your kingdom of love,
where there are only brothers and sisters,
and kindness is the air we breathe. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Hymn The Lord's my Shepherd R&S 679

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

My soul He doth restore again;
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
Even for His own Name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill;

For Thou art with me; and Thy rod
And staff my comfort still.

My table Thou hast furnishèd
In presence of my foes;
My head Thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me;
And in God's house forevermore
My dwelling place shall be.

Children leave for Sunday Club

Prayers

We celebrate today our mothers who bore us and cradled us as infants.

We also remember mothers who have lost their children
through illness or violence, whose tears still flow from their broken hearts.

We cherish our families who have sheltered us from harm and who provided for our daily needs.

Christ Church, 19 March 2023. Mothering Sunday

We remember families who are separated and those exiled from the land of their birth by frontiers, by barbed wire, and by war's violence.
We express gratitude to our spiritual mothers and fathers who guided us throughout life, modelling for us the love of God.
We hold up mothers of diverse religions and creeds who experience life in disparate ways—
those who are comforted and encouraged by what they believe and those who struggle to find meaning and hope in their faith.
We pray for those who we love and hold dear to our hearts—
children, youth, young adults, the middle-aged and elderly;
And we pray for those we know and do not hold dear,
and those who we do not know and whose suffering we have not embraced.
On this Mother's Day, we come to worship the living God, to honour our mothers,
and to find solace and peace in the goodness that life brings;
Acknowledging the joys and sorrows of life,
we hope to depart this place transformed by Christ's Spirit
that we may express compassion, seek justice,
show mercy and pursue peace. Amen

Ever-faithful God, whose being is perfect righteousness:
reconcile us through your Son with the helpless and the needy,
with those we would ignore or oppress,
and with those we have called enemies,
heal disagreements and discord,
that we may serve all people as your hands of love,
and sit at the feet of those who need our compassionate care. Amen.

Remember that God forgives us and gives us the grace to change our lives.
Have courage, forgive yourselves, listen at the feet of Jesus and learn through his example
compassion and understanding. Amen

Hymn Christ is the world's light R&S 600

Christ is the world's Light, Christ and none other;
born in our darkness, he became our Brother.
If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:
Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's life, Christ and none other;
sold once for silver, murdered here, our brother-
he, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father:
Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's peace, Christ and none other;
no one can serve him and despise another.
Who else unites us, one in God the Father?
Glory to God on high.

Give God the glory, God and none other;
give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;
give God the glory, God with us, my brother:
Glory to God on high.

F. Pratt Green

Bible readings: **Ephesians 5:8-14**
 John 9:1-41

Today's healing of the blind man, needs to be seen in the context of John's gospel as a whole, sandwiched as it is between the encounter with the Samaritan woman last week, and the raising of Lazarus which comes next week and is the last of the 'signs' or miracles that John uses to show the identity and divinity of Christ; the first being the changing of wine into water at the wedding in Cana. Today's sign and next week's start the build up of the Jewish leaders trying to find a way to kill Jesus because so many people are starting to

follow him. John chapter 9 furthers several of the key themes that permeate John's Gospel. John uses the miracles to point to a deeper meaning about Jesus' identity. In the same way that the wedding at Cana reveals Jesus as the abundantly generous host of the banquet of God's kingdom and the feeding of the 5,000 shows Jesus as a nourishing provider, today's sign demonstrates that Jesus is the giver of sight and the revealer of truth. Jesus physically restores sight to the blind man, he claims to be "the light of the world", and he reveals the truth of his own identity as the Son of Man while challenging the Pharisee's blindness to that fact. The topic of light and darkness, is a motif that undergirds the whole Gospel narrative. The beginning of the Gospel informs us that the Word is the true light of the world. During his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, Jesus implies that he is the light who has come into the world to expose the evil deeds of those who love darkness. And Jesus' declaration here, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world," highlights both the illuminating work of God and the temporality of Jesus' time on earth, as it leads up to his final days in Jerusalem. Let's look now more closely at today's story.

The phrase that immediately leapt out at me was 'who sinned, this man or his parents?' which reminds us of the importance of looking at scripture in its context. We don't these days equate illness and disability with sin, though it was the commonly held belief in the time of Jesus. We don't think that someone gets cancer, for example, because they or their parents did something wrong. And thankfully, neither did Jesus. He is very clear that neither the man, nor his parents sinned; the nameless man was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.

However, that can also be a problematic concept. The idea that people suffer so that God's work might be revealed is not very palatable. And next week we will see how Jesus waits to visit his friends, so that the death of Lazarus will be for God's glory and that they Son of Man may be glorified. And there can be a problem with the healing too. The idea that a disabled person, as we would view it these days, is lacking something, has something missing, is not complete, is again not acceptable today. Many in the deaf community, for example, only consider themselves to be different, in a way that hearing society does not recognise or accept, and they would be appalled at the idea that they need fixing. The blind man in this story had been blind from birth, we're told. He never knew anything different. He would not have known what he was missing, though he would probably have known he was missing something, if for no other reason than that his blindness made him poor and compelled him to beg on the street. Yet he did not ask to be healed. This story is about seeing and not seeing, both physically and spiritually. Knowing and not knowing. Accepting

and not accepting Jesus as the one who comes so that those who do not see may see, and those who think they do see, may become blind.

The blind man just happens to be there, unlike healing stories in other gospels, the man is not asking to be healed, he does not call out for Jesus to have mercy on him, and unlike the other stories of Jesus healing blind men there is not a large crowd telling the man to be quiet. As far as we know, it is just Jesus and his disciples who stumble across the blind man, sitting there minding his own business. He is the pawn in John's much bigger story. The disciples take blindness for granted as a fact of life. The *cause* of the man's blindness is the only thing of interest to them – who committed the sin. But this is not what is interesting to Jesus. For Jesus this is an opportunity to reveal God's glory, to explain to the disciples again that he is the light of the world, and that they must be the light of the world also, so that the work of God may continue even after Jesus is gone. 'We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day,' for night is coming, he says.

John is doing something different with his story of blindness. He is telling us something about the identity of Jesus. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels where the blind know Jesus – they call him Son of David and ask for mercy, they stand up to the crowds telling them to be quiet and once they have sight they immediately follow Jesus and praise God. John's blind man is different – He is blind from birth. He has not lost something he formerly had. He asks for nothing. He does not know who Jesus is. He does not call out to Jesus for help. Yet he goes and washes as Jesus tells him to and is then able to see, but he does not begin to praise God or follow Jesus, for Jesus has disappeared. His neighbours do not know him. Without his blindness they cannot recognise him. He wasn't their friend, or their neighbour, or part of their community; he was just the blind beggar. Once he is no longer blind, they have difficulty seeing who he is. His badge of identity has disappeared. He says, 'I am the man' in response to their doubts and questions and yet when asked where Jesus is, he answers truthfully, 'I do not know.' He has sight but he still cannot see fully.

Then the Pharisees come along, looking for trouble as usual, perhaps seeking to catch Jesus healing on the Sabbath again, though the fact that the act occurred on the Sabbath is very much an afterthought for John, not part of the main plot. The Pharisees were divided about Jesus – for them he is a sinner because he doesn't observe the Sabbath and they ask the blind man what he thinks. The man who healed him was a prophet, he says. He does not name Jesus. He still cannot see who Jesus is, though he's getting closer. The people still do not believe him, so they call the blind man's parents and ask them. How can he now see? The parents claim to not know how he now has sight, nor who did it. So the people call the man again. And now God begins to work through him. 'One thing I do know,

that though I was blind, now I see.' They ask him again, 'But how? How did he open your eyes?' And now the formerly blind man gets a bit annoyed with them. He has already told them, but they would not listen. He taunts them, 'Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples?' Knowing full well that they don't; vision at last beginning to dawn on him. They say they do not know where Jesus comes from. What does it matter, says the man, 'he opened my eyes' and finally, only a man from God could do such a thing. But still the people cannot see or hear. They mock the man, how can someone born entirely blind, born entirely in sin as they thought, teach them anything, and they drove him out. Now Jesus reappears, he still has some more work to do with and through this man. 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' he asks and the blind man says, 'Who is he?' Jesus says, 'You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he.' And the man replied, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. We might say, finally he had sight. Not that it was restored, but that it was given, all was revealed to him anew, and the point that John made in Jesus' own words in verse five becomes clearer; 'I am the light of the world. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.'

It is not through the man's *affliction* that God's glory was revealed, but through the miracle of his gaining sight – physical and metaphorical. Jesus worked through him as he can work through all of us if we let him. John is showing us a different world; not a flawless world, nor a world shot through with miracles, but a world in which through overcoming hardship God is revealed. God has sent his Son, as Jesus sent the blind man to the pool of Siloam, to render God knowable. We are called and guided to a life open to God's initiative. As the ones who must do God's work, as children of light we must stand for something different, for something other. If we never find ourselves at odds with the powerful and the status quo that should give us pause. The blind man, unlike his parents, had the courage again and again to say what he knew, to tell people about the amazing grace by which he was touched. He didn't get it right all the time. His sight, his knowledge came gradually, but from the start he knew that he was changed by the encounter with Jesus. He said immediately that it was Jesus who had opened his eyes. And his faith grew until he proclaimed Jesus as a prophet, as a man of God and worshipped him, even though for this he was driven out, shunned by his community. The people that once only saw him as disabled, now only see him as a troublemaker and want nothing to do with him.

God works through us, even if we are resistant, even if we are blind and unknowing, even if we refuse to see and have to be made aware many times. We must be troublemakers for God so that eventually God's work will come to fruition through our hands... and eyes... and ears.

Christ Church, 19 March 2023. Mothering Sunday

Hymn Amazing Grace R&S 92

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
was blind but now I see.

As grace first taught my heart to fear
so grace my fears relieved
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils, and snares
I have already come

God's grace has brought me safe thus far
and he will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

And when this heart and flesh shall fail
and mortal life shall cease
I shall possess within the veil
a life of joy and peace.

John Newton

Lord's Supper

We remember, as we come to this table, the gift of the life and death of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Come to this table, you who are beloved in Christ. Come, not because you must, but because you may.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.
You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.
You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people throughout the generations,
and the gathered wisdom of many years.
You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up
in difficult times where there was little peace.
He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.
He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.
He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.
For these things, he suffered. For these things, he died.
And he was raised from death and lives with you forever.
You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us,
to remind us of Jesus Christ and to make us one in him.
For all these gifts we thank you, and join with all your people
on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine,
and upon your people, that Christ may be with us,
and we may be ready to live for you
and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. Amen

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Sharing of bread and wine

Most gracious God, we thank you for what you have given us.
You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.
Now we give ourselves to you, and ask that our daily living
may be part of the life of your kingdom,
and that our love may be your love
reaching out into the life of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayers of intercession

Almighty Lord, Heavenly Father, Mothering God,
beyond our understanding, yet from deep within our hearts we cry out to you.
As your beloved children, we bring before you all that we are: sorrow, pain, hope, joy.
Compassionate God: Console those denied the chance to celebrate Mother's Day –
the abandoned, the separated, the disappointed; bring us all together as your family of faith.
Sustain those who mourn loved ones; for whom today is a day of grief.
Comfort us with the wellspring of our memories.
Unifying God: Inspire us to advocate for peace and justice,
and guide us to see the part we can play in creating harmony in this world.
Reconcile us to each other, that we might embody your forgiveness and live as one.
Bountiful God: Kindle in us a celebration of the diversity of all families,
of all shapes and sizes, of all colours and faiths.
Teach us to grow in compassion and understanding,
remembering that even with our differences we are all your children.
Nurturing God: Encourage us to share in the joy and effort
of making healthy, peaceful communities.
Open our hearts to reach out to our neighbours in charity and acceptance.
Mothering God, beyond our understanding, yet from deep within our hearts,
we reach out to you: Take us up in your arms and heal us.
Bend down to us and feed us. Wrap us in your bands of love.
And in the silence we bring to you all those who need your love and healing today...

Lord's Prayer

Hymn Christ is the world's true light R&S 601

Christ is the world's true light,
its captain of salvation,
the daystar clear and bright
and joy of every nation;
new life, new hope awakes,
where'er we own his sway;
freedom her bondage breaks,
and night is turned to day.

In Christ all races meet,
their ancient feuds forgetting,
the whole round world complete,
from sunrise to its setting:
when Christ is throned as Lord,
all shall forsake their fear,
to ploughshare bear the sword,
to pruning-hook the spear.

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One Lord, in one great Name
unite us all who own thee;
cast out our pride and shame
that hinder to enthrone thee;
the world has waited long,
has travailed long in pain;
to heal its ancient wrong,
come, Prince of Peace, and reign.

G. W. Briggs

Blessing

Go now, and embrace the hope to which God has called us.

Recognise Christ in friend and stranger,
and as Christ has been gracious to you,
so be gracious to those in need.

And may God give you a place of rest on rich pasture;

May Christ Jesus be the shepherd king who binds your wounds;

And may the Holy Spirit give you wisdom and reveal to you
the fullness of the one who fills all in all.

And the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever, Amen

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