

I Samuel 16: 1-13
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5: 8-14
St. John 9: 1-41

Lent IV 2023.

“The parents said this [ask their adult son himself about his healing] because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if any one should confess [Jesus] to be the Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.” St. John 9: 22

Matthew, Mark and Luke are sometimes called the “synoptic” gospels. “Synoptic” literally means being “one-eyed” or having a single perspective. Matthew, Mark and Luke all want to tell the biography of Jesus, the Son of God. (Most Bible teachers think that Matthew and Luke had a copy of Mark when they wrote their books.)

When we read the Gospel according to St. John, though, we soon see that John is a little different. It’s still another biography of Jesus, but John is more reflective, more theological...

We see that in today’s gospel reading, from John 9... The story begins with the Lord Jesus healing a man who had been blind from birth. Let’s note that Jesus specifically says that this illness is not because anyone sinned. (Let’s get rid of any lingering doubts that if someone is sick, then they must have done something wrong!) Instead, the man’s healing will bring further glory to God...

So, there’s this amazing healing. But as St. John tells the story, he doesn’t spend a lot of time writing about this healing. It’s *expected* for there to be healing, transformation and forgiveness, whenever the Lord Jesus shows up...

John 9 tells a lot about the *reaction* after the man is healed. First, there is the group of Pharisees, who were responsible for enforcing all the ceremonial laws (collectively, The Law)... The group of Pharisees are as angry as wet hens, because Jesus healed on a Sabbath Day – the Day of Rest. “How can Jesus be doing God’s work, if he isn’t following all the rules?” they ask. So, here’s one reaction – the ticked-off Pharisees...

The second group of people is the Lord Jesus and his disciples. God’s kingdom is being established on earth through the person of Jesus Christ himself. This is the second group of people in this story – the new community of the Church is being formed...

We could say that the healed man himself is moving from the old community – the Jewish law which flooded all aspects of Judean life – by his healing, this man who had been blind is being prepared for the new community, of the followers of Jesus. A new spiritual community is being established...

There are 2 more people singled out in this story: The man's parents. The Pharisees have already warned that if anyone confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, they're going to be thrown out of the synagogue. The healed man's parents are terrified of losing their social position in the community – they're afraid of being expelled from their place in worship. So the man's parents take the cowardly way out: They say, basically, "We don't know what's going on. If you want to know what's happened to our adult son, go talk to him yourself..."

That might invite us to ask a question of ourselves: Are we mainly worried about what other people will think about us?... Or, is recognizing the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives most important of all?...

So, a lot of this story is about *belonging* – belonging to the old community of faith; or, belonging to the new community of the Church of Jesus, with all the wonder that comes with it...

We belong to this living tradition of the worldwide Church of God. Through Jesus Christ, we recognize our deep unity with God, and the transformation of our lives. We are brothers and sisters into the adopted family of the Church. Of course, the Church today has a number of local expressions – there are Anglicans and the eastern Orthodox, there are Roman Catholics and Baptists, there are Presbyterians and Pentecostals, and so on. But whatever our different styles or details, we are fundamentally One...

Paul explains:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4: 4-6)

The writer C. S. Lewis uses the picture of a house, to explain that there are many different expressions of Christianity, but what matters most is unity in Christ. Imagine there is a large house with many rooms in it. When one is in the house – when one has come through the front door, there is a fundamental change. If the house is the Christian Church as a whole, we are *in Christ* when we have entered the front door... But our job is not to hover and hesitate at the front entrance, but to go into one of the rooms. The kitchen might be like the Anglicans; the parlour like the Roman Catholics; the dining hall like the Baptists, and so forth. Each room is different, but they are all within the same house. In the same way, what matters most is that we are in the house – that we are Christians. But we can't be in the house, without also being in one of the *rooms* in the house. For example, St. Brice's happens to be part of the wider community called the Anglican Communion...

Lewis concludes his illustration by pleading for us to be spiritually generous to people who are in different rooms of the Christian house, and to be patient with those who are hesitating in the front hall, trying to decide in which room they belong:

When you have reached your own room, be kind to those who have chosen different doors and to those who are still in the hall. If they are wrong they need your prayers all the more; and if they are your enemies, then you are under orders to pray for them. This is one of the rules common to the whole house.

Now, for the past few weeks, we've been thinking about the "Lambeth Calls." (These are focuses which the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops have invited us to learn more about.) Two weeks ago, we considered "Inter-Faith Relationships" on Sunday morning. What is our stance to be, toward people who are not Christians, and have no desire to become Christians?... Last week, we thought about "Human Dignity" and "Evangelism." Today, let's consider more about "Anglican Identity..." What are the features of the Anglican room, which are distinct from the room next door, another denomination?... We will not be so arrogant as to say we are *better*, but humbly to acknowledge we have a distinct identity, which on the whole has worked well for us...

I don't want us to get too theoretical. Let's begin with the phrases we sometimes hear, about different Anglicans being "High Church" or "Low Church." What on earth does that mean?...

One parish and a neighbouring parish can have very different worship styles, yet still both be Anglican. A "High Church" parish tends to have a lot of emphasis on ceremony. A very high Church parish will typically celebrate the Eucharist a lot – even to have daily celebrations of the Mass. Some of the service might be sung in Latin and in Greek. Incense is frequently used in high Church parishes. There is often particular devotions to the saints. The role of bishops, apostolic succession, and our bonds to the Church throughout the ages is especially emphasized... That's a High Church parish...

In contrast, a very Low Church parish will celebrate Communion far less frequently. There is a greater emphasis on preaching and attention to scripture. The worship tends to be much more minimalist, with less light and colour being used...

Now, we don't get as worked up these days about these worship styles as we used to... Most parishes are somewhere "between the two extremes..." If a very High Church parish is a "10," and a very Low Church parish is a "1," where is St. Brice's?... I'd put us somewhere around a "4." I think we tend to be more biblically literate than a lot of Canadian Anglicans, frankly. We have no problem with hangings, clergy robes, and stained glass; we value the bishop's overall ministry... So, maybe we're about a "4" out of "10..."

To my mind, if a new practice brings us closer to Jesus Christ, bring it on! If it's a veil, which keep us from drawing nearer to the Lord Jesus, let's think again...

A second distinctive feature of Anglican Christians is in your hands, or in the book holder in your pew: The *Book of Common Prayer*... Anglicans do not have a single authority like the Pope. We don't have confessional statements like the Presbyterian Westminster Confessions, or the Lutheran Augsburg Confessions. Anglicans have said, If you want to know what we believe, look at how we *pray*...

Of course, language changes over time. So, for pastoral reasons, we predominantly use the *Book of Alternative Services* in modern English. However, the prayers and phrases of the older B.C.P. are still close to my heart – and probably that of many other Anglicans who grew up with it...

Please turn to page 544 of the dark-red-covered B.C.P... This is the Anglican Catechism – a short summary of our key teachings about Jesus Christ and his Church...

I prepared a handout, which shares some other notable points about the Anglican expression of Christianity. For now, let's conclude with a couple of discussion questions:

1. Why did you first come to St. Brice's?
2. If someone asked you, what do you enjoy most about St. Brice's? What, if anything, is the most challenging?

-pray for God's Church Universal
BCP, p. 39