

## Born blind – go and wash

HN 29/05/05 pm

Reading: II Kings 5:1-19, Acts 22:1-16

Study Text: John 9:6-7

Sing Psalms: 103:1-5; 51:1-5; 51:6-10, 103:11-13

Go and wash. The man at the door was a VIP. He was the chief of the army. But he was afflicted with leprosy, a repulsive and incurable disease before the days of antibiotics. Still he expected the prophet to come out and *stand and call on the name of the Lord and wave his hand and over the place and heal the leprosy* (II Kings 5:11). He was furious when a messenger boy appeared and told him to go and wash in the Jordan.

Thankfully his servants were more humble and persuaded him to go and wash – ‘it is such a simple and straight forward command’ they said in effect-‘what is your problem’? Naaman went and washed in the Jordan and was cleansed of his leprosy. The water did not heal him of course; it was the power of God. He obeyed the word from the Lord’s servant – he went, washed and was healed.

Jesus told the man born blind to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. He did not come to Jesus but Jesus found him destitute, begging by the side of the road. He went, he washed and he came back seeing. What a marvel, what a miracle! How amazing is the love and the power of Jesus to heal a man with congenital blindness. But even more amazing than having his physical eyes opened is the marvel of having his spiritual eyes opened. He saw the Son of God, he believed and worshipped him.

The bright flash of light blinded Saul as he walked along the road. God sent Ananias to him. *Brother Saul, he said, receive your sight. And now why are you waiting. Arise be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord* (Acts 22:13, 16). Saul not only had his sight restored but he his sins were washed away and he became a new creation in Christ Jesus – the man now called Paul. He was blind but now he saw the truth about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

### What Jesus did

Jesus healed many blind people during his ministry, although no others who were born blind, as far as we are told. He healed them with a word- *go your way, your faith has made you well* (Mark 10:52). He spat in a blind man’s eyes and touched his eyes to heal him (Mark 8:23). He did different things usually to elicit faith in the blind or sick person. He did not have any special technique for it was by the power of God that he healed – he was doing the works of his Father.

Why then did he spit in the dust, make clay and smear it on this blind man’s eyes? All manner of medical explanation and allegorical associations have been imposed upon this action. The ancient world thought highly of the curative values of saliva we are told. They probably thought mud had healing properties also. I am reminded of how in India village people would rub cow dung on the severed umbilical cord thinking this would hasten the healing.

Was Jesus going along with their beliefs in order to gain credibility with them? Surely not! Neither the saliva nor the mud had any curative value for this man’s eyes. This action of Jesus was symbolic

and it was an action to elicit faith. Calvin comments that the clay ‘in some respects doubled the blindness...but in this way Jesus intended to try the faith and obedience of the blind man’. The mud in his eyes gave him good reason to go and wash. He could not see but he could feel the dirt sticking to him, dirt that would make him blind even if he could see.

What a contrast this man was to the Jews from whom Jesus had recently escaped. They thought they were squeaky clean. They had no trouble seeing! Everything was clear to them – Jesus was an impostor, a blasphemer. How dare he tell them they were slaves to sin, children of the devil! They failed to see their sin; they were blind to their sin.

The Puritans would preach law – law and the holiness of God -before they proclaimed the gospel of grace. People must see their sin before they can hear the gospel. We must all feel the dirt, the filthiness of sin in our hearts just as this man felt that mud in his eyes. We must acknowledge our spiritual blindness, our sin, before we can be healed. I have come, said Jesus, that those who do not see may see and – and that those who see may be made blind (9:39). The Pharisees did not really get the message- do you?

Like Naaman, the Pharisees were proud men, proud of their heritage and conscious of their social status. Naaman came with lots of cash to Elisha. The Pharisees came with lots of good works to Jesus. Still today many come to Jesus with a bundle of good works seeking to be saved. When told all that is needed is to repent and believe in Jesus Christ they are offended. Surely I must do something, surely my good works count for something. No they do not. They are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

The mud in his eyes encouraged this blind man to obey the command of Jesus. It was something tangible to strengthen his faith. Naaman may have been more willing to wash in the Jordan if he was covered with mud. Even today Jesus gives us tangible things to strengthen our faith. We have just participated in the Lord’s Supper.

Eating the bread and drinking the wine did not cleanse us of our sin. But those elements reminded us of what did cleanse us of our sin – the blood of Jesus Christ. And then there is baptism of course. These are the two sacraments that Jesus gave to us to strengthen our faith.

The water of baptism symbolises the washing away of sin. Such water is no more efficacious than the water of the Jordan was in cleansing Naaman, or the water of Siloam in healing this blind man. It was the power of God that healed these men and it the power of God that makes you a new creation in Christ Jesus, born again of the Spirit of God.

### **What the man did**

*Go and wash* said Jesus after smearing mud in his eyes. Jesus demanded faith in his word (cf. Mark 10:52). Naaman’s pride almost stopped him from going. This poor man went immediately, groping his way in the darkness along the streets of Jerusalem towards the pool of Siloam. How those words of Jesus must have rung in his ears – go and wash. He knew it was Jesus who told him but did not know him as the ‘sent one’ of God at this time.

Why Siloam we might ask? Was there not a closer place to wash? King Hezekiah built a tunnel to bring (send) water from a spring near the temple into this pool inside the city wall – hence the name Siloam. That John bothers to tell us the meaning of this word is probably significant. Isaiah rebuked

the people for refusing the waters of Shiloh (Isaiah 8:6). Shiloh (Siloam) is also a name found in Genesis 49:10 – understood to be a messianic title. ‘Sent from the Father’ is what Jesus has been telling the Jews about himself for some time.

So while in one sense the water of Siloam was just like any water, there does appear to be deeper spiritual significance attached to the name of this pool. It was after all the specific command of Jesus. And so it is the specific command of God that for spiritual cleansing one must go to the true Siloam, to the One who was sent by the Father to save sinners. Only in Jesus Christ do we find ‘spiritual illumination without which one cannot see the true light from God’.

And such were some of you Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians. They had been thieves, idolaters, drunkards, extortioners, and sexually immoral in all sorts of ways including homosexuality. They had been covered in filth. *But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God* (I Corinthians 11).

### **What God did**

The blind man went and washed his eyes and came back seeing. This is a marvellous thing he said later – he opened my eyes. *Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.* He knew he had received grace and experienced the power of Almighty God.

How amazing is the grace and the power of God. How great was the faith of this man – truly he was a child of Abraham. Jesus came to this man in his desperate condition – helpless and hopeless he was. Not just physically blind but spiritually blind also. Jesus reached out and touched him. He told him to go and wash.

In faith the man went and washed. He obeyed the words of Jesus. All things are possible to him who believes. *Is anything too hard for the Lord?* How often do we limit the power of Jesus? We have things in our life that we think he cannot forgive. We have ways we think he cannot change. We cannot change the past we say, but why don’t you trust your past into Jesus hands and see what he can do. He gives us more grace – grace to forgive, grace to overcome, grace to see the glories of heaven above.

What can wash away my sin?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus  
What can make me whole again?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus  
Oh precious is the flow  
That makes me white as snow  
No other font I know  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*