

“A new way of seeing things”

One of my favourite artists is JOLOMO, a Scottish artist who paints with vibrancy, strong colours and dramatic landscapes. I had met John several times before he became a world renowned artist and found him to be a very genuine and caring person and so meeting him over 30 years later in a small church in Kintyre, was a humbling experience; 30 years earlier he had dedicated his life to painting and preaching and it was lovely to discover that John hadn't change from the man that I first knew. The Lord has honoured him in both aspects of his life.

What a rare gift it is to paint as he does with bright colours. What a gift it is to see his paintings – for eye sight is truly a gift from God.

In our gospel story today we meet a man who was blind from birth.

He had never seen a tree or a flower. He wouldn't have known what colour was; his life was dominated with darkness.

His sight had been completely shut off from the outside world. We don't know a lot about this man, except he had parents and he is able to argue his case with the authorities.

Blindness was common in the first century world. Eye diseases had few cures and there were many factors that did not help – particularly unsanitary conditions.

This blind man would have been completely dependent on others.

Perhaps, like the paralysed man, who was carried on a mat to Jesus. The blindman would have been led out to beg each day.

His quality of life would have been poor and it would be a fair assumption to make that he was cut off from his community and isolated. In first century Judaism – if you could not maintain the purity laws, then you were classed a sinner and so cut out of Jewish community.

That day, as he sat on the streets – hoping and praying for a few sheckels. He would have been familiar with the noise and sounds of bustling Jerusalem.

However, his life was about to change; yes in a twinkling of an eye, he was about to encounter a new way of seeing things. For Jesus was passing by, we are told, “as he went along, he saw a man born blind... “Wherever Jesus passes, transformation begins. When Christ passes our way, be ready for God to work. Christ brings light and colour to our world like JOLOMO brings to his paintings. JOLOMO helps us to see things in a new way!

There is a painting of small croft house beside a track somewhere in the highlands. I'm not sure if its JOLOMO's but its definitely his style and the colours are bold but the colour that stands out above them all is the red corrugated iron roof of the croft. But the story is that the roof wasn't always red – infact it had been an unattractive rusty brown, showing the wear and tear of the west coast weather.

When the owner of the house heard that an artist painted his croft with a red roof, far from being offended, he was delighted and proceeded to paint his roof red, in line with the painting. What a transformation to that little croft and it all came because the artist saw the potential and he created a new way of seeing things.

Jesus sees potential in us also and he longs for us to be transformed to be what God intended us to be. He doesn't just give us a quick lick of paint or a quick fix, he comes into our lives and transforms us from within.

As he passes our way, he sees us; he already knows us and he wants to linger with us.

Is he passing your way today? The very fact that you are listening to this sermon today, you are letting Christ come your way.

Notice, Jesus observed the man blind from birth. He was interested in him; His focus was on this poor soul. Something about this man drew Jesus to him.

Nothing wrong with Jesus' eyesight, his eye is always on the sparrow, goes the old gospel song. His eye is always on the weak and the vulnerable and the lonely and the isolated. This we saw last week, in our reading about the Samaritan woman at the well, in the noon day heat, she came to the well, when others would not gather. Christ entered into her loneliness.

Then the week before, we considered how the religious leader Nicodemus sneaked in at night time to see Jesus, taking his opportunity to meet with Jesus away from the public stare; What this tells us, is that Jesus loves to meet us on our own. He has time for the individual – you matter to him.

This is what makes the gospels so powerful and beautiful, that in Christ, God came for the individual. He came to bring us into light and wholeness and community. Jesus said I have come to give you fulness of life.

Today, Jesus is passing your way. Maybe you feel isolated today, cut off, fearful. The coronavirus has brought fear to our communities. It is that unseen, unwanted guest, that has no face and knows no boundaries. It is an enemy from

within but as people of faith, friends we don't give into fear and we don't panic because we have one greater than any virus passing our way.

We have God's spirit with us. Psalm 139 reminds us that there is nowhere that God is not already there. If you feel alone or troubled, go to this wonderful psalm and meditate on it and let the words flow into your heart and mind.

God wants us to experience community. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in community.

Through meeting Jesus, the woman at the well was brought back into her community. She leaves her water fetcher and immediately goes back to her village, to tell her community, come see a man who has told me everything, could this be the Messiah and the blindman, is again reinstated in his community. Once I was blind but now, I see! This was his testimony. They both discovered a new way of seeing.

An American soldier, based in Sweden, was spending the day in Stockholm. Travelling across town on a bus he fell into conversation with the man sitting next to him. The man correctly identified himself as an American and they got talking about the soldier's home country. The soldier expounded his pride in his nation, especially the value of American citizenship. The United States of America, he proclaimed is the most democratic country in the world. Ordinary citizens may go to the Whitehouse to see the president and personally discuss things with him.

The man listened intently and when he had the opportunity to interject offered, Sir, I am delighted with that. But it is nothing to what we have here. For in Sweden, the king and the people travel on the same bus.

With that, the man rose to leave the bus, as it arrived at his stop. The soldier was left somewhat bemused, but everything was clarified when the man sitting behind him leaned forward and informed him that he had just been talking with King Gustav Adolf VI of Sweden.

Isn't that a beautiful story, reminding us that we have a King who thinks we are worth it – we have a King who comes to us and sits beside us and who walks with us and whose greatest desire is to combat loneliness and gives us a real sense of worth and belonging and who helps us to discover to a new way of seeing things.

Jesus said that he and his followers must do God's work while there is still time to do it. God's work being shedding the light of Jesus, into this world and so

helping others see things in a new way – God’s way. Just as Jesus helped the blind man!

Jesus pressed on with God’s work each day, for he knew that the night of the cross lay before him.

In these dark times that we all face, let us also continue his work while there is still time to do it. Jesus said, so long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

There is for us all an opportunity to receive Christ’s light into our lives and to see things in a new way and if that opportunity is never seized it may never come back.

Today Jesus is passing your way and he is calling your name, to come and follow him and to walk in the light.

Willie Barklay comments “E.D. Starbuck in his book the Psychology of Religion, has some interesting and warning statistics about the age in which people come to faith in Christ. It can occur as early as seven or eight; it increases gradually to the ages of ten or eleven; it increases rapidly to the age of sixteen; it declines steeply to the age of twenty; and after thirty it is very rare.

God is always saying to us, now is the time. It is not that the power of Jesus grows less, or that his light grows dim; it is that if we put off the great decision, we become increasingly less able to take it as the years go on. Work must be done, decisions must be taken, while it is day, before the night falls”.

So like JOLOMO’s red roofed house, are we going to allow Christ to come into our lives and to open our eyes of faith to see things in a new way?

Today, my friend, if you hear his voice telling you to go the pool of Siloam and be cleansed, go and your life will never be the same again.