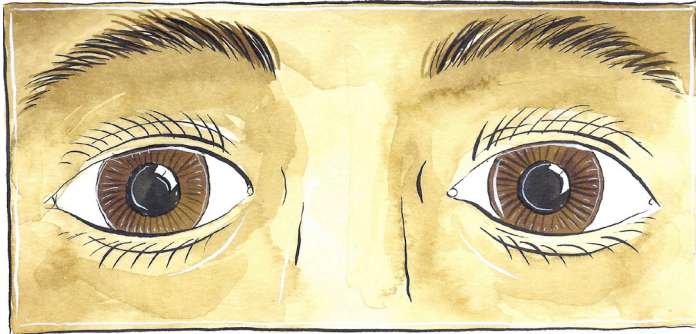


Bible reading John 9:1-41

Gradual insights

THIS WEEK WE EXPLORE THE POWER OF AN EYE-OPENING STORY.

How often do we find ourselves saying 'I see' when we really mean 'I understand'? In today's Gospel reading, the contrast between them is clear: we read about overcoming physical blindness and also growing in understanding. But not everyone experiences or is open to both. Are we?



Can you make something without seeing clearly what you are doing? Put some modelling clay or play dough in front of you on a table. Blindfold yourself (or ask someone to do it for you), then try to make a model of an animal of your choice. When you are done, take off the blindfold and see how well you did. You could do this with others and choose a winner. Ask yourself: do you make assumptions about others' perspectives – the way they might see things differently? What could you do differently to help overcome this?



Look for stories in newspapers/magazines about fantastic feats of healing such as heart surgery or recovery from cancer, or an incredible rescue or escape story. Make a new newspaper front page under the title 'Miracle news', cutting words and images from the old ones and adding your own words and drawings. Take a few moments to think about the stories you have featured, and how we take such things for granted now. Give thanks to God for all whose work brings healing and freedom; and thank God for being the great healer and saviour of us all.



Do an exploration of a building you know – it could be your home, church, school, place of work, community building – making notes about what you find: the good points and the not so good. In particular, look out for anything that might be an issue for someone with physical or intellectual challenges – e.g. steps but no ramp; light switch out of reach. Is there anything you can do about any of these issues? Anyone you could tell? Anyone you could help to overcome an obstacle or issue?

Bible notes

This extended narrative is the fruit of discussion and reflection on an incident of healing. It has been applied to the situation of Christians towards the end of the first century, when Jewish-Christians began to be expelled from the synagogues (see v.22). As the drama unfolds, we are aware of contrasts between the characters. The man starts out as blind but gains not only physical sight but also spiritual sight. Some of the religious authorities insist that they have spiritual sight and dismiss Jesus, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.' They refuse to learn anything from either Jesus or the man he heals, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' Refusing to see God's work among them, they remain in sin, preferring darkness to light (see 1:9-11).

The man is also contrasted with his parents. As parents of a disabled child, they were profoundly aware that something wonderful had happened, but fearing the consequences of upsetting the authorities they will say only, 'He is of age: ask him.' This exchange suggests that the man was very young, which makes his courage all the more remarkable. He insists throughout, with a God-given confidence, 'I am the man.' Noticing that the authorities are divided about Jesus he audaciously asks, 'Do you also want to become his disciples?' Holding fast to the truth, 'I was blind, now I see', his understanding of Jesus progresses. The man who put mud on his eyes is a prophet, is from God, is Lord. 'And he worshipped him.'

First impressions

- What do you find striking about this image?
- When have you not been able to believe your eyes?
- What is God showing you through this week's Bible story?



A prayer to action

Lord, open my eyes to see what you are revealing.
Open my mouth to speak about you.
Guide my thoughts and increase my understanding.
Stir my heart to love as you loved us.
Move my hands and feet to serve you in others.
In the name of Jesus Christ, my example and friend.
Amen.



Think for a moment about the impact that blindness can have on someone's life. Perhaps you know someone who is sight impaired. Then watch Michael's story from the Sightsavers website (sightsavers.org/stories/2019/02/michels-story/). What are your thoughts and reflections on this? Any surprises? Is there anything you can or should do?