St Peter the Fisherman – Whitianga
March 19th 2023

Theme: (Healing the Blind Man)

I runga i te ingoa o te papa, te tama, me te wairua tapu.

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
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We are spending a lot of time with John this Lent, and for a very good reason. The main theme in the Gospel book of John is to prove conclusively that Jesus is the Son of God and that all who believe in Him will have eternal life. Clearly that could be considered more than a little important as we move through this waiting period of Lent, towards Easter, where Jesus is arrested, crucified, died, and is resurrected from that death. Not your everyday events, by any stretch of the imagination, but John is at pains to draw a direct line from the very first words he writes in Chapter 1,
(text slide)

*In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.)*

through every subsequent example he includes, (many of which appear only in John’s gospel), of Jesus revealing himself as the promised Messiah.

Not included this year, is one of my favourite examples of Jesus early work. Namely the very first miracle he performs, in response to his mother’s request that he ‘helps out’ when the wine supply at the wedding at Cana runs out. My Sunday school children were always hugely impressed with the fact that even Jesus did what his mother asked.

Then, John continues to use the theme of water, especially ‘living water’, as a significant part of Jesus’ explanation about himself, in response to Nicodemus’ visit and questions, and a little later with the Samaritan woman at the well. From the beginning of creation, water has been one of the most important elements for survival. It cleanses and refreshes, makes all things new.
(slide – from Psalm 23)

In pastures green he leadeth me, the quiet waters by,
(slide – flood damage)

It also can destroy, damage, and defile, as we are all too painfully aware at the moment as we look at the devastation wrought to our country by unwanted and out of control floods of water.
Moving on from just talking about himself, Jesus then starts demonstrating his divine abilities. (Healing the official’s son)

There is the healing of the royal official’s critically ill son, where he doesn’t even need to visit the boy. This is followed by the healing of the paralysed man at the Beth-zatha pool.
(Beth-zatha pool)

Water again, even though the man didn’t actually need to go into the pool for Jesus to heal him.
(loaves and fishes)

Jesus moves on to beside the sea of Galilee, and manages to distribute five bread rolls and two small fish around five thousand people with plenty of leftovers,
(walks on water)

then joins his disciples that evening by walking on water to reach their boat.

He continues his fateful journey towards Jerusalem, with a number of clear (well, clear to us in hindsight) communications about himself; who he is, and his imminent death. Not all of these germinated with all his hearers, especially the Pharisees, as we know.
(healing a blind man)

Today, we have the first example of Jesus’ actual physical contact with a person he heals. The blind man near the pool of Siloam.
(Bartimaeus can see)

Water again is an important element of the demonstration of his power. However, this situation is also an opportunity for him to make clear the difference between wilful sin actions, and externally generated situations which have brought the blind man a diminished ability to live normally. Thus, not to be judged as sinful behaviour.
(slide)

Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind? Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned”.

 This is a very important message, often missed when we look at this story. It is especially relevant these days, as we encounter people who are apparently trapped in difficult, challenging, overwhelming lives, as a result of decisions or circumstances not of their making. (Montage)

We cannot and must not judge them, we must share the grace we live with, in any useful form that could help them move closer to the lives we can tend to take for granted. Yes, even those lives which we gained from our own hard efforts and personal sacrifices.

Not everyone starts from the same starting position or can run the race of life with the same advantages. Not everyone lives in a safe place – either environmentally, or by choice, or financial, or peaceful, or ethnic circumstances. How do we, like Jesus in this story, “work the works of him who sent us?” We find a way to provide a kind of sight to those who could be called metaphorically blind and unable to see a future better than their lives now, because of any variety of reasons.

We don’t even have to be with them – as Jesus wasn’t with the little boy who was ill.

It is also possible a conversation with someone could release a paralysis that has kept that person emotionally crippled. Our metaphorical contribution of five rolls and two small fish could feed a multitude somewhere. The blind man didn’t ask Jesus to make him see, Jesus saw him and immediately sensed a need that could be addressed. We also don’t have to wait to be asked. If we just look or listen, we can identify needs which we could help meet. The next step is to respond as Jesus did – do something to make that life or lives better.

Yes, John was using the progressively clear events of Jesus’ journey to show he was indeed the son of God, and as we will see next week, those events culminated in raising his beloved friend Lazarus to life. We don’t have to go as far as physically emulating Jesus’ actions, but in each of those events and conversations where Jesus was engaged, throughout John’s gospel, we are being shown how we too, using them as analogies for our lives and actions, can behave as God would hope of us, namely being our part of the body of Christ.

Amen.