

Lent 4, 30/3/2014, Holy Trinity

John 9:1-41

First, I want to share with you the parenting dilemma that I faced as I prepared for this morning's sermon.

In the English Church, the Fourth Sunday in Lent is known as Mothering or Refreshment Sunday and many Anglican Churches in Australia, including our parish, carry on this tradition.

On the other hand, in the Gospel reading for this Sunday in Lent, John gives us the sign that Jesus performed on the man who was born blind and who can now see and so I looked for some connection between the two.

As I think of mothering these days my thoughts turn more in terms of parenting than only in the responsibilities of a mother.

Now there are stay-at-home fathers who take smaller children to pre-school or stay with them in a play group.

We know of the taxi service using the family car to take the children to school and home again, to sports' training and playing at the week-end and to other activities that take up so much of family time.

Then there are fractured families, single mother or father families with very little support from family or friends.

There are families in which abuse of various kinds is rife.

I am not trying to paint a grim picture but this is the reality of life to-day for many people.

On the other hand, there are families where parenting is similar to that which many experienced in times past except that they too have changed to accommodate the current changes in society.

So Mothering Sunday to-day is vastly different to what it was a century or so ago in the English Church.

Great changes have taken place in society, in parenting and the Church must be prepared to change to meet the changed conditions.

Already in this parish we are doing some things differently to meet the changing circumstances of society.

From now on, we, the community of faith in this place will need to be even more innovative in working to realise the will of God to meet the changing needs of people, adults, children and teen-agers who come under the care of Mother Church.

Now as we look at to-day's Gospel we find that some attitudes remain the same.

We are told that this incident is a sign that does not end with the man who was born blind receiving his sight.

It shows that even in the midst of things that we cannot understand God is at work.

So we find ourselves in the midst of the story.

The disciples ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents that he was born blind?"

Yet for many people some elements of the thinking in this Gospel reading remain the same.

The belief is still prevalent to-day that bad things happen to people because they deserve it.

"What have I done to deserve this?" "I must have done something really bad for this to happen to me." "God is punishing me for having done so and so."

When it comes to mass disasters like the recent plane crash and the mud slide in the United States or a famine that kills hundreds of people through starvation, we ask "Is the world so wicked that God is punishing us?"

Jesus is quite adamant in his reply to the disciples' question.

"No", says Jesus, "His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parent's sins."

He goes on to say, in effect, that God uses bad things to show his glory.

Be aware also of our blindness in relation to some elements of parenting and some of the attitudes of society as a whole and some attitudes that are prevalent in the Church.

The people of the world can be brought from blindness to sight, from darkness to light, as we turn to God and see Jesus as the Light of the world.

So in the midst of change in society "Innovation" is the buzz-word for us as we encourage people to turn to God.

We are to show that God is not in the business of punishment or revenge.

We are to show that God is love.