John 10:11-18 – 21/4/24

Sermon video link: <https://youtu.be/dIzft6bvE3o>

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday, but the Good Shepherd image Jesus uses begins with a question about a blind man.

The disciples are walking along with Jesus, and they come across a man who was blind from birth. The disciples ask Jesus *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*” (John 9:2, NIV). This question reveals how common it was for people at the time to assume that if something went wrong in someone’s life it was automatically because of sin, therefore it was their fault. Even today many people look at people whose lives are filled with illness, pain, tragedy, poverty, or struggle and assume that somehow, they are to blame. There is even a name for this cause-and-effect way of thinking, it is called karma.

Sometimes people do make bad life choices that result in bad outcomes, but it is rarely as simple as each bad outcome being the direct result of a bad decision and therefore the person’s fault. Often many things are out of the control of a person, and that can impact how that person’s life turns out. Making simple assumptions that whatever certain people are struggling with is karma can be way off the mark. Worse still it can lead to a lack of empathy and compassion. It becomes too easy to justify not helping and instead say, “Too bad, they have made their own bed, now they can lay in it.

Jesus answered his disciples and said, *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him”* (9:3, NIV). There was a wider purpose for this man’s blindness, hidden from this man and from anyone who knew him. All the assumptions people had made for years about this man and his family, about his standing before God, his worth and his sinfulness were way off the mark.

This man’s blindness is going to show the world who Jesus is and reveal his power, empathy, compassion, and love. This man’s blindness is going to expose the injustice of being judgemental and reducing people to labels. This man’s blindness and the way Jesus treats this man is going to teach the world how we should treat all people in need.

Jesus makes some with mud made from dirt and spit, puts it on the man’s eyes and sends him off still blind. At this stage, the blind man only knows Jesus by his voice. He goes to the pool of Siloam to wash off the mud and returns home able to see.

His neighbours then take him to the religious leaders because that is their tradition. The religious leaders were meant to be the shepherds of the people and it was their job to reinstate people who had been considered sinners. The expectation is that they will declare the man healed and no longer a sinner. The stigma of his blindness would be taken away from him and his parents.

Things don’t go well. Instead of declaring the man healed, they end up declaring him a sinner from birth and throwing him out of the synagogue. The reason is that he was healed on the Sabbath, by Jesus. The Pharisees in charge didn’t believe Jesus was from God and were expelling anyone associated with Jesus. The man is physically healed but socially and religiously still an outcast.

Upon finding out that the leaders have thrown the man out of the synagogue he finds him, and talks to him. Finally hearing the voice of the man who had healed him and seeing him face to face he comes to faith in Christ and worships Jesus. Not only have his eyes been opened but his mind and heart have been opened and he can see clearly who Jesus is.

The man was rejected by the Pharisees running the synagogue but healed and accepted by Jesus. Now he is part of a new community with a new shepherd. A loving and compassionate shepherd who has totally changed his life.

Then Jesus says, *“For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”* (John 10:39, NIV). Some Pharisees overhear Jesus and take it personally, sparking a conversation with Jesus. Jesus begins to use images his hearers are familiar with such as sheep, shepherds, hired hands, robbers, and wolves.

At one point Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:10, NIV). Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and has a close relationship with his sheep. The same kind of relationship that he has with God the Father. A personal relationship where they love each other, know each other and listen to each other. Jesus has this same close relationship with his sheep. He knows them to their innermost being, he loves them and he listens to them. In return the sheep know Jesus, they recognise his voice.

Not only does Jesus know and love his sheep, his love for them is so deep that he lays down his life for them. God the Father loves Jesus because Jesus lays his life down for his sheep, God the Father gives him the authority to take it up again and rise for the sheep.

This explains why Jesus healed the blind man, because he was a sheep not yet in his sheep pen and he loved him. Out of love and compassion, he healed the man born blind. When the religious leaders, the hired hands rejected him, Jesus, the Good Shepherd found him and invited him into a loving relationship with Jesus and with the other sheep in the pen. Jesus the Good Shepherd healed the man physically but more importantly, he made the man whole socially and spiritually.

At the end of John’s account of the Gospel, the disciples are fishing when Jesus meets them on the lakeshore. With Jesus’ help, they have a big catch of fish. Jesus cooks them a fish and bread breakfast. Then he asks Peter, three times, “Do you love me.” Peter keeps answering, “Yes Lord you know that I love you.” Jesus replies, “Feed my lambs.” “Feed my sheep.” “Feed my sheep.” (see John 21:15-17).

When we love Jesus, he wants us to direct that love to his sheep. Both those who are already part of his flock and those who are still to be called into his flock. How do we love them? Like Jesus loved the man born blind.

This pattern of love, compassion, care, healing, and invitation into relationship, is the pattern Jesus calls us to live by. Instead of excluding people like the leaders of the synagogue did, we are to be like Jesus. We are called to not be judgemental and judge others as unworthy sinners. Rather we are called to remember that we don’t know anyone’s full story. God has a plan for all people to bring us forgiveness, love, compassion, and a new fulfilling life with Jesus the Good Shepherd.

**Amen.**

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz