

Old Testament *1 Samuel 16:1–13*
Psalm *Psalm 23*
New Testament *Ephesians 5:8–14*
Gospel *John 9:1–41*¹

I remember a time when I was out walking along some bush tracks with a group of people and we came to an old rail tunnel. It was both exciting and scary entering from the light into darkness. We didn't have a torch so we had to completely rely on our senses.

At first it was not too bad because the light extended into the tunnel for some distance, but gradually the strong light became dim and eventually total darkness. Turning and looking back we could see the light and it was tempting to return but sometimes we just have to face what is in front of us and carry on.

Each step took us further into the dark and the echoes of the tunnel as we kicked unseen rocks and called to each other echoed back upon us creating an even more difficult experience because it was hard to discern where exactly the sound came from. Behind still the light getting smaller, before us the darkness getting deeper. It was really a valley of shadow, maybe not so much of death but it created a sense uncertainty and confusion. Our steps went from confident strides to small shuffles as we walked through this deep darkness as we trusted the end of the tunnel must surely come.

¹ *Revised Common Lectionary* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2009).

Come it did. As we entered the light, once again our steps took on a confidence we didn't feel in the depths of darkness, the echoes lessened and we rejoiced at the sunshine on our faces as we exited the long tunnel.

I'm sure many of you have stories as I have just told of being blind and coming into light. In my story it was a physical blindness, but I can tell of stories of other blindness in my life. Often in interviews, I remember being as about my strengths and weaknesses. These are blind spots we often don't see or even want to acknowledge and they can often sideswipe us at moments we least expect. But I learnt from my tunnel experience that hope and light were at the end of the tunnel.

Samuel was in a quandary, he wasn't in Saul's good books yet God called him to go chose another to be the Lord's anointed one. Now like many of us, Samuel saw a fine specimen before him and assumed that would be God's choice. But it wasn't any of the seven sons whom Jesse brought before Samuel. Some seemed to have the traits that Samuel thought God might be looking for, yet God reminded Samuel it was not physical that God looked at but the heart, the unseen part.

David, we are told, filled both physical and heart traits and Samuel knew in his heart and by the voice of God that this was the chosen one.

Jesus, also saw beyond the physical blindness of the man and corrected his disciples very ingrained perception – still prevalent today – that this man or his parents were punished by God because he was blind. Yet Jesus tells them he was blind to bring glory to God. Not quite the response I would have expected if I had been part of Jesus group.

Correcting the blindness sets up a series of questions, answers and demands of the previously blinded man, his parents and of those who debated whether Jesus was of/from God.

In the end, it was the blind man who taught them a lesson and worshipped Jesus, the Son of Man – a title of used to refer to Jesus to indicate that he was human born of the flesh just as any other of those around him were. Those who denied they were blind to the things that Jesus did in the name of God were told their sin remained because they refused to acknowledge the work of God among them. Acknowledging their blindness and accepting they didn't know everything about God and what/who God was/is would have resulted in them remaining innocent.

So it is in our moments of blindness, things we don't wish to see or even just things we don't know, turn us from knowing because we refuse to acknowledge we are wrong or unwilling to understand something different than we are used to. The phrase 'blinded by the light' is apt as is 'depths of darkness' reminding us that darkness is the absence of light. Even darkness serves a purpose in our lives – to enlighten us but we have to be willing to accept the change it brings to us.

Our psalm set for today is psalm 23. It is a well-known psalm and often people find comfort in its words. It reminds us that when we are weary, God is with us, sustaining and nurturing us. It reminds us that even in the face of evil and in our darkness, God is there guarding and guiding us. And when we come to the end of those valleys we find rest before the journey begins again.

The letter to Ephesians reminds us that before we found God through Jesus by the testimony of those who had received the blessing of the Holy Spirit, we lived in darkness. Now we live in light we are to seek the light in all things and turn from darkness. *“This is why it is said: ‘Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’”* (Ephesians 5:14, NIV (Anglicised, 2011)).

Before meeting Jesus, we were sleepers to the gift of God’s grace, love and mercy. Now we are part of God’s family and heirs to the Kingdom of God.

Take a moment now and think about a time when you realised your heart or mind was enlightened and it changed you because what was unknown became known and give thanks to God or think of a current situation that you need enlightening and ask God to open you to understanding.

<silence>

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for your light in the midst of our blindness, forgive us that we may come to you and receive the life which is through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and brother in the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.