

Sermon: Fourth Sunday in Lent: 26 March 2017

*Jesus heard that they had driven him out (John 9.35a).*

Ouch. That hurts. To be driven out of a community, to be told you don't belong, that you're not good enough, that what you believe or how you live is a threat to others – even if you know you're in the right, that's cold comfort when you're left alone. But “Jesus heard that they had driven him out,” and so he went and sought him out to draw him in to himself.

How often do we drive people out because we fear their difference? How often do we shut them out because they challenge us or make us uncomfortable? How often do we isolate others because we don't know how to fit them into our picture of reality? We do this more often than we realize, of course, as we are blind to so many of our own assumptions and prejudices.

And it can happen so subtly. In our eagerness for knowledge, we mistake a glimpse of the truth for the whole picture. We mistake a passing experience for an eternal and changeless reality. We come across something good and helpful in the moment, and we grab hold and try to make it the stable foundation for everything. This is in some way understandable, as we live in a world that is constantly changing, while we long for stability. We crave predictability. We need to feel in control of at least some aspect of our lives.

But as long as we rely on ourselves for that stability, predictability and control, we cling to a false security. As long as we make our own perspective the standard of truth and godliness, we do violence to those we can't control, to those we don't understand, to those who see differently. If we acknowledge that our view of reality is only partial, we remain open to receiving vision from Christ. If we remember that Christ is the true foundation, we will find that there is room for more varied architecture than we could have imagined.

But we must begin by admitting our own blindness. If we claim to see, we are blind, but if we admit we are blind, we leave room for receiving sight. “God, I am blind; whom am I not seeing? Christ, I am blind; who am I not loving?” We must begin with this – not once for all, but over and over and over again, as every fresh insight brings new blind-spots with it. We must allow Christ to be the light, never taking that function for ourselves. The church’s life depends on it.

For wherever the church persists in driving people out because we can’t bear to see them, because they challenge our comfort and control, Christ will meet them outside our walls, where the blind still receive sight.

Amen