

Lent Four

Read

[John 9:1–41](#)

Text and Land

Once again the text brings us back to Jerusalem, the Holy City.

Jesus seems to be strolling in the vicinity of the temple. People still do that. We take students there on almost every course at St George's College.

At the base of the western wall of Herod's monumental landscaping works, there is an ancient Jewish holy site. Once called the 'Wailing Wall', it is now just known as the 'Western Wall' or the *Kotel* ('Wall'). Above the remains of Herod's temple site stands the Dome of the Rock, one of the holiest sites in Islam. Pilgrims and tourists come to see them both. Beggars seek alms. Others come seeking an answer to prayer, or to fulfill a vow.

At the bottom of the hill is the Pool of Siloam. Once a reservoir for fresh water for domestic and ritual purposes, it is now a polluted pool that no one would use for anything other than irrigation. In the time of Jesus, a monumental set of steps linked the pool to the temple.

To this pool, one of several in the vicinity of the temple with reputations as places of healing, Jesus sent the blind man after first having smeared his eyes with mud. At this pool, observant Jews may have performed their ritual baths before approaching the temple. Water was drawn from this pool for the water ceremony during Sukkoth (Tabernacles). This was a ritual marked with great celebrations, dancing and acrobatics.

Against the cultural setting of joyful celebration, John projects a darker story of religious tensions and parents unable to celebrate the healing of their son. All this in a story that begins with the disciples asking whether this man's blindness was a punishment for his sins or the sins of his parents.

Questions for Discussion

- Who are the blind in this story: the man born blind, the Pharisees who cannot see God's work in front of them, or the fearful parents who cannot celebrate their son's healing?
- Jerusalem is home to many religious extremists, but they are also to be found in other places. Which expressions of Christian extremism worry you most? What can you do to address these issues and encourage healthier forms of faith?
- Many churches will observe this Sunday as 'Mothering Sunday'. How can we celebrate and strengthen the role of mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and aunts?
- Despite the blindness, the fear and the religious extremism to be found in this story, it is essentially a story of hope and healing. Despite all our failings, God is still at work to heal and restore broken lives.

Prayer

Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?'
(John 9.40)

*"May God bless you with the gift of tears
to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish,
so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy."
(A portion of A Franciscan blessing)*

Sit with the words of the blessing, and let them stir your spirit.

