

As I said last week, in Year A our Gospel passages for the third, the fourth and the fifth Sundays of Lent have belonged to these Sundays since the time of the early Church.

They're long stories, long stories of encounters with Jesus:

Matthew, Mark and Luke tell the story of Jesus through a myriad of short incidents.

John does the opposite:

just a few major incidents, but explored at great length, and in great depth.

Again, as I said last week, it's thought that John's Gospel was written with those preparing for baptism in mind.

And that these long stories were an invitation to those entering the Christian community

to identify with the main protagonist in each story

and stand with each protagonist

in their encounter with Jesus, *and their coming to faith to faith in him.*

And I think that phrase '*coming to faith*' is absolutely crucial to these three stories that have for so long belonged to the time of Lent.

'Coming to faith':

John's Gospel isn't presenting faith to us as a thing, a finished thing.

These stories speak of faith *as a growing thing, an evolving thing*:

the woman at the well, the man born blind, Martha and Mary morning Lazarus.

It's so beautifully told in this weekend's story of the man born blind:

three times he's given the opportunity to say who he thinks Jesus is.

The first time, you might remember, he says: '*the man* Jesus healed me'.

The second time: 'he is a prophet'.

And the third time: 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshipped him."

**John tells us this beautiful story of someone coming to see at the deepest level,
*coming to recognise within his experiences the presence of the hand of God.***

Not giving up because of the obstacles being put in his way,

coming to recognise Jesus as a man, then a prophet, and finally as God.

The same thing happens across these three weekends:

the woman of Samaria who's mystified

as to how Jesus is going to get her some of *the living water* he speaks of

when he doesn't even have a bucket!

You couldn't say that she was displaying a very poetic spirit!

And even when she does come to faith it's because, as she tells the townspeople,

'he told her all about her life':

she must have seen him as some sort of palm reader!

hardly the deepest of conversions.

But it was hers.

And next Sunday again have a story

of deeper understanding coming through a series of misunderstandings

as Jesus leads Mary to move from seeing resurrection as a future hope

to being the experience of his very person in the present.

These are stories of faith which is *a process*, a journey,

not a destination, not a finished product.

faith which has to go through misunderstandings, and questions and imperfections;

And it's so important to remember

that the faith of the Samaritan woman by the end of the story,
is not *the same faith* that the man born blind comes to,
nor is that the same faith at which Mary arrives.

And nor do we know where their journey of faith led *after* the small snapshots we're given.

We don't have to measure our faith against anyone else's.

It doesn't come in quantities.

*It's our own very human attempt to seek God,
to entrust ourselves to God,
to find strength in God.*

And sometimes that will be like the unquenched thirst of the Samaritan woman,
sometimes like the poor sight of the man born blind,
sometimes the grief of Mary at Bethany,

.....and hopefully sometimes like a glimpse of Easter Sunday morning.

Which is hopefully a very strengthening message for us in these unsettling times in which we find ourselves:

our uncertainties put us in very good company

– with these three great, but very human, figures in John’s Gospel,

who found God walking into their lives in unexpected garb.

Today’s story of the man born blind

invites us to look for the unexpected ways in which God walks into our own lives,

present there even when we may not see.

so that like the man born blind we may have our eyes opened

to the subtle presence of God who is with us even in the most difficult of times.

Fr Colin Blayney