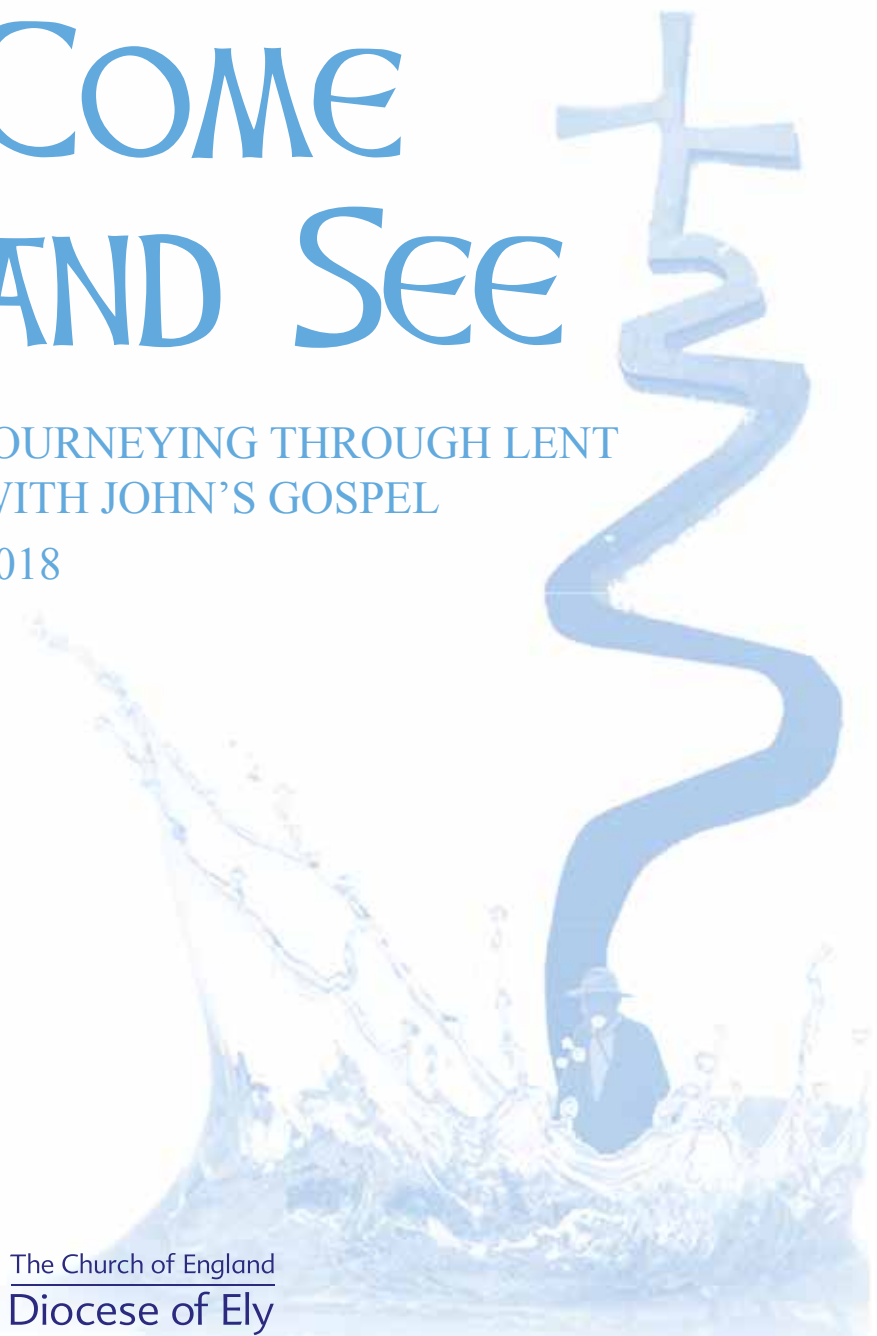




COME AND SEE

JOURNEYING THROUGH LENT
WITH JOHN'S GOSPEL

2018





*Figure 1: A carving from the front of the pulpit in St Mary's Church, Kempton, Brighton
(photograph by Petra Shakeshaft and reproduced by permission)*

Authorship

This material was written by James Blandford-Baker, Andy Chrich, Richard Darmody and Petra Shakeshaft. We have indicated who wrote what in the main text. We would be delighted to receive feedback on this material.

Leader's Notes

Timing

We anticipate groups meeting for 1½ hours where 1¼ hours are taken up with the material provided and then 15 minutes for prayer. The prayer time is really important so do be disciplined about this and move on to prayer even if you haven't managed to discuss all the questions. You may like to finish your time together with refreshments; this usually works better than having them at the beginning.

Leading the Group

The material here is offered in the hope that you will use it flexibly. For instance, you may like to move items around and use silence at certain points. We very much encourage you to do this.

Reading the Passage

Each session includes reading the passage through twice (in a similar way to the 'dwelling in the word' exercise that has become so widespread and appreciated in the diocese). It is a good idea to choose two different readers for this. We have deliberately not included the passages of Scripture in full. Do encourage everyone to bring a Bible and help those who don't know their way around it with finding the passage; this all builds important skills and confidence! We have used the New Revised Standard Version for preparing these studies.

Ending the Session

At the end of each session encourage the group to summarise what they have learned and think about how their church community might grow, refocus something they are doing already or start doing something new as a result. Then read these summary notes out at the beginning of the next session. This is a great way of reinforcing what has been learned and growing together.

Ending the Course

At the end of the course take some time to think about whether the group has a future in meeting together to continue to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. You may like to think about using material such as the Pilgrim Course (the format of which formed the basis of these sessions on John).

Session One: Water

John 4.1–30

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, open our hearts and minds to your word and to one another as we come together to seek you and discern your will for us. **Amen.**

First Reading of John 4.1–30

Reflection 1

Name those things you thirst for? Share your thoughts briefly with one another.

Second Reading of John 4.1–30

Reflection 2

The meeting of the Samaritan woman with Jesus is an encounter experienced bodily. It happens in real time, at noon, and in a real place, Jacob's Well. She comes to draw water from the ancestral watering hole given by their common forefather to slake her real, physical, thirst in the heat of the midday sun. It is a daily slog, the walk to the well to quench a thirst that will return again and again.

Jesus too, knows that craving for water.

Give me a drink

The woman knows they should neither speak to one another nor share the jar she has brought with her, for *Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans*. Their conversation crosses cultural boundaries and purposes. They come from different places, she from Samaria, he from Galilee. She, from below the earthly realm and he, from above, the heavens. She, a woman and he, a man.

They find common ground, a meeting place at a well, a life-sustaining place where their shared ancestor watered his flocks and his family. Jesus offers her another kind of water—living water; water that will gush up like a spring to eternal life. Still she misunderstands, thinking it will merely save her tired legs that daily trek.

If you knew the gift of God and who is saying this to you...

If you knew

And she doesn't know, doesn't recognise him as both the source of her thirst and the source of the Living Water. But then he tells her things about herself that he can't possibly know.

You have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband.

And for the first time ever, she knows herself to be known.

Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done. Can he be the Messiah?

All her thirsts, all her longings; for a husband, for acceptance, for love, have come to their source; a source that crosses all boundaries of race, creed or gender, body and spirit, time and space, to quench all her cravings, all her longings at once. And as she is filled she overflows with a grace that says to others, *Come and see.*

Questions

1. Look at the image of the Samaritan woman and Jesus. There is something 'edgy' about the picture—the characters are drawn right up to the edge of the frame. The woman perches on the edge of the well and the jar is balanced precariously. Jesus, on the other hand, is seated firmly on the wall, stable, authoritative. What might this be saying about what is happening to the woman?
2. Water is used throughout Scripture as a symbol of life and Spirit. What physical properties does water have that might indicate how the Spirit works on us?
3. The woman comes to the well in the heat of the midday sun. It has been suggested by some commentators that, perhaps because of her lifestyle—the five husbands—she is shunned and so unable to collect water when the other women gather at the well when the day is cooler. Think about the kinds of people in our society who are shunned or ignored. Are there any people whom the church should exclude?
4. John often uses irony in his Gospel stories to show how Jesus crosses cultural and religious boundaries to reach people on the edge of society.

With this in mind, what ways may the Holy Communion service draw us closer to Jesus and to the world?

Quiet Meditation

Allow for some minutes where each person can find some physical or mental space to ask themselves these questions. How can I get closer to Jesus Christ? What can I do this week which will help mend a broken relationship, near or far away?

Creative Devotion

Resources: Make a vine—cut-outs of vine leaves or vine leaves, paper and wax crayons, scissors, large piece of paper, a cross-shape.

Make a vine leaf rubbing by placing the leaf under the sheet of paper and rubbing the wax crayon (on its side is best) over the top. Cut out the leaf. Think about Christ as the vine on whom you are grafted and pray for his life-giving Spirit to come in you and through you. Write a prayer or reflection on the leaf and place on the large sheet of paper. As a group, draw lines—or vines between the leaves from the cross.

Closing Prayer

Dear Jesus, help me to spread your fragrance wherever I go. Flood my soul with your Spirit and life. Stay with me and then I will begin to shine as you shine. **Amen.**

Richard Darmody

work reflects their own relationship. They love one another, and Jesus obeys his Father (v 10). Jesus remains in his Father's love. Their close relationship is a pattern for us to follow. For Jesus, his closeness to his Father was not pain free, neither may our relationship with Jesus lack a cross. Yet we will discover his closeness to us in every situation.

Our Relationship with Others

This picture of the vine is also about followers of Jesus being with Jesus, and Jesus and his Father being with them. This makes disciples the new people of God, "the Body of Christ." *Together* we hear God's word (v3), and pray (v16) and have joy (v11). However, we are not a club. Our call is to live out these relationships in a broken, fragmented world to transform it.

Questions

1. Spend some time looking at the picture of the vine on the ceiling of the San Clemente Church in Rome. What do you see? What picture might you want to paint of your relationship with Christ? (Some may want an opportunity to try drawing. It needn't be a masterpiece!).
2. There are shadows too in John's picture of the vine. What do we make of the branches that are cut off? Is this always the end of their story (give examples)?
3. The losses in life are often hard to bear. What can you say about painful events leading to spiritual growth? Can you give examples?
4. Our churches are sometimes judged by their relationships. If relationships are so vital to the gospel how can we make our churches places where we find Jesus in each other? What practical things could be done to achieve this?
5. Prayer is something we often feel bad at doing. Does God care that we pray "badly?" What might need to stop in our lives to give God a chance to speak to us or to hear from us?
6. Joy is also mentioned in this passage. What do you understand by the comment of Pope Francis that "there are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter." Does this apply to us and if so how can we change?
7. What does fruitfulness look like in the context of the world we inhabit?
8. In Chapter 6 Jesus is described as bread and here as a vine, suggesting wine.

So God moves around among the people who are denied access to the Temple healing and making whole. Discuss examples of the church reaching across accepted boundaries. What does/might your church do to extend its mission to people on the edge?

5. Jesus tells the woman everything she has ever done. What is it like to be known by God? (You might also look at Psalm 139).
6. The woman's reaction to her encounter with Jesus is to leave her jar behind and go and tell others who believed her testimony—despite her being a woman (whose testimony should not be trusted) and having no witness to her testimony, which was required by Jewish Law. How does sharing our story with others encourage them to come to him? How might we do this?
7. In biblical times the Torah or Jewish Bible was often referred to as a well containing the knowledge of God. Knowledge in the Bible implies intimacy. It is personal, relational intimacy that involves profound encounter. How might 'drinking' from our Scriptures help us to deepen our relationship with God?

Creative Devotion

Resources: A bowl of water, bottle of water and some glasses, a bowl of dry sand.

Pick up a handful of sand. Feel it and let it run through your fingers. Think of all the dry places in your life; those things for which you thirst, those unquenched longings.

Pray for the water of life to well up inside you.

Now scoop up a handful of water. Feel it run through your fingers. You may want to splash your face with it or make the sign of the cross on your forehead. Pour yourself a glass of water and drink it. Feel your thirst quenched.

Closing Prayer

Water of Life, well up inside us like an everlasting spring. As you know us deeply and intimately, give us grace and knowledge of you that we may seek to draw others to you. **Amen.**

Petra Shakeshaft



Figure 2: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Supper at Emmaus*, 1601, Oil and Tempera on Canvas, National Gallery, London

Session Five: 'Vine'

John 15.1–17

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on us. Ground us in your love and help us to grow in loving concern for *all* our neighbours so that we might see the world around us transformed by your gentle reign. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The chunky stem supports tendrils bearing bright green leaves and plump grapes. Go to any vineyard and you will see for yourself the organic relationship between each part of this plant. Nevertheless, it is a plant which needs careful attention and loving cultivation to flourish. The vine was a familiar sight to Jesus and his disciples as they travelled the Holy Land, where you can still see these rustic vineyards.

The familiar picture of the vine prompted Jesus to use it as a teaching point. By doing so Jesus made the vine a metaphor for several types of *relationships* which we will describe.

Our Relationship with Jesus

First, the way the branch grows out of the stem becomes a picture of the intimate connection between Jesus and ourselves. Jesus is the vine and we disciples are the branches. Israel in the Old Testament had also been God's vine but an unfaithful one, often going astray. Jesus, in contrast, is a "true" and faithful vine. *Our spiritual life* comes from being close to Jesus, God's Son: as close as the branch is to the vine. He is our life. We are only alive when we are depending on him. It is our closeness to Jesus which helps us to live a fruitful life. Or perhaps he is living his life through us.

We will only be close to Jesus and like Jesus if we are "pruned". Pruning is painful but essential for healthy growth and is the work of God our Father. Pruning are those moments of loss, failure, grief, and catastrophe which God uses for our growth. Pruning by God our Father is not a punishment but times of shedding which enables us to grow in love.

Jesus' Relationship with the Father

Jesus' relationship with his Father can also be seen in the vine. They both work together for our growth and joy, both giving us life, though in different ways. Their



Figure 5: Apse Mosaic at San Clemente, Rome by Masolino da Panicale, 12th Century AD

Session Two: 'Bread'

John 6.25–59

A loaf of freshly baked bread on a table in the centre of the room would enhance the session today. (Five small loaves if you prefer. You may feel that two fish are surplus to requirements!) Enjoy the aroma of the bread, and perhaps share it at the end of the session.

Opening Prayer

Lord, you sent your Son to be the living bread in whom all our hungers are satisfied. Make us hungry today to feed on him, and as we open the scriptures, may our hearts burn within us, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

First Reading of John 6.25–59

Second Reading of John 6.25–59

Reflection 1

What words, pictures or ideas stand out for you in this passage? Share with one another briefly what has drawn your attention.

Reflection 2

They search for him because they have an appetite for more. In this Passover season they have seen Jesus take bread, give thanks, and with five loaves and two fish satisfy the hunger of five thousand.

They follow him to Capernaum, travelling by boat after Jesus, unbeknown, has crossed the sea on foot. But when they find him, Jesus points them beyond perishable food to work for imperishable food for eternal life. To find this food, they must believe in him as the Son of Man, sent by God. The people want another sign and point to Moses supplying manna in the wilderness. Jesus responds that his Father provides the true bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. 'Sir,' they say, 'give us this bread always.'

Deuteronomy 8.3 speaks of God feeding the people with manna that they might understand 'that one does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.' Manna and bread in the Old Testament become

images of the word of God, the Law and Wisdom. When Jesus declares 'I am the bread of life' he is saying that he is superior to everything that they have built their lives upon. He is offering the people nothing less than the very life of God. To believe in Jesus is to receive eternal life, to be gathered up like the fragments at the feeding of the 5000, not to be lost but to be raised up on the last day.

Jesus speaks in metaphor, and like Nicodemus and the woman at the well before, the crowds struggle with his words, hearing them literally. How can they eat his flesh, and how can they possibly drink his blood in a culture where the consumption of even the blood of an animal is forbidden? We are pointed to the crucifixion when the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of his blood will be the means by which his life is given up for the life of the world.

When John later describes the Last Supper, he does not describe Jesus taking bread and wine to be to the disciples his body and his blood. Many have suggested that these words in chapter six are so eucharistic that there is no need for him to do so.

Questions

1. 'Sir, give us this bread always' (v34). When the crowds make this request of Jesus they do not know what they are asking for. What hungers does Jesus satisfy in you? Are there still things that you are hungry for?
2. 'Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you' (v27). What are the perishable things that occupy our attention? How could we better focus on the imperishable?
3. It is believed that at the time that the Gospel of John was written, many followers of Jesus Christ would have been driven out of the synagogues. How might verses 37–40 comfort them? How might they comfort us today?
4. The crowds struggle with Jesus' description of himself as bread come down from heaven, because they know his father and mother. What is John trying to tell us in this chapter about the identity of Jesus?
5. The crowds follow Jesus because they have seen the feeding of the 5000 as a sign (v14). Why do you think they ask for another sign?

pasture.' He also says (v10) that he has come that 'they may have life and have it abundantly.' What do you understand by this?

7. Jesus (v16) suggests that he has other sheep that do not belong to this fold but that he must bring them also 'so there will be one flock and one shepherd.' What do you think this might mean for church unity and for mission?
8. In verses 15 and 17 Jesus talks about his close relationship with his heavenly Father. He also suggests (verse 18) that he has power (or authority) to lay down his life and to take it up again. What might this mean for the way we understand Jesus' death and resurrection?

Creative Devotion

Resources: Some wooden bricks, stones or paper to make a sheepfold. Small cross, squares of paper/post-it notes or, if you like, sheep cut-outs.

Make a sheepfold with the bricks, stones or by folding the paper. Place the cross at the 'gate'. Write your name on one side of a piece of paper/sheep cut-out and put it just outside the sheepfold. Think about the times you have wandered away from the Shepherd and hear him calling your name. You may like to write a prayer or reflection on the other side of your paper before you place it inside the sheepfold and give thanks that Jesus knows you by name and calls you to be with him.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd and our Saviour, give us grace to know your voice more clearly, to follow you more nearly, and to love you more dearly as you lead us into abundant life, for your name's sake. **Amen.**

Andy Chrich

because they recognised their own shepherd's voice. The shepherds would know their sheep by name leading them out to find pasture and water. Outside the village the wolf, lion, leopard and bear were all a threat. Theft was also a risk. Towards the end of the grass growing season, as it became necessary to travel greater distances for pasture, shepherds would make use of stone sheepfolds constructed in the wilderness. At night, the shepherd could sleep in the gateway to these folds, with a fire to keep him warm and to offer extra protection.

From Psalm 23 onwards, the shepherd and sheep theme recurs frequently in the Bible. David of course, to whom the psalm is ascribed, is the shepherd who becomes a great king, but God is the one true and constant shepherd. There are bad shepherds too, with Ezekiel 34 in particular describing the leaders of the people as shepherds who do not protect but devour the flock. Therefore, God himself will search for his sheep, and gather them together, binding up the injured.

When Jesus describes the Good Shepherd as the one who *lays down his life for the sheep*, this is a new idea. We are led to the cross and the resurrection as Jesus, demonstrating the love of the Father, speaks of willingly laying down his life and taking it up again that his flock might know abundant life.

Questions

1. John Constable was familiar with shepherding in rural Britain rather than the Middle East. What picture of the role of the shepherd does his painting provide? How does this interact with Jesus' description of the Good Shepherd?
2. In verses 3 to 5, Jesus talks of the sheep listening for the voice of their shepherd and following him? In Jesus' day, what might have been the voices competing for the attention of God's people? What voices compete for our attention today?
3. How can we become better at listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd?
4. Jesus says that the Good Shepherd knows his sheep by name. What does that mean for us today?
6. In verses 7 and 9 Jesus describes himself as the gate for the sheep saying that whoever enters by him 'will be saved and will come in and go out and find

6. The picture today shows us Caravaggio's interpretation of Luke's account of the supper at Emmaus. What do you see in the picture, and how does it speak to you?
7. How do you respond to the idea that John does not include an account of the Last Supper in his Gospel because he has already covered much of the ground in his description of Jesus as the Bread of Life? How might this shape your experience of Holy Communion?

Creative Devotion

Resources: A small loaf of bread on a plate, a basket.

Pass the bread around the group. As you offer it to your neighbour say, Jesus said, *'I am the bread of life. Feed on me.'* As you receive the bread, break off a small piece and eat it slowly. Thank God for all he gives you to sustain you in body mind and spirit.

Pass the bread around a second time. This time break a small piece off and place it in a basket in the centre of the table. Pray for the poor and hungry, those who hunger for Justice and for those who long for God. (If you set this up as a prayer station in Church you could use communion wafers.)

Closing Prayer

Jesus, Bread of Life, nourish and feed us, that we may be strengthened to serve you with all that we are and in all that we do, to the glory of your name. **Amen.**

Andy Chrich



Figure 3: *Jesus Opens the Eyes of a Man born Blind* (1311), Duccio di Buoninsegna. National Gallery London. Egg Tempera on wood

Session Four: 'Shepherd'

John 10.1–18

Opening Prayer

Lord, you are our Good Shepherd, therefore can we lack nothing. Lead us today to green pastures and still waters, that we may know ourselves restored and lead along paths of righteousness for your name's sake. Amen.

First Reading of John 10.1–18

Second Reading of John 10.1–18

Reflection 1

What words, pictures or ideas stand out for you in this passage? Share with one another briefly what has drawn your attention.

Reflection 2

In the Yorkshire Dales parish where I used to serve Harvest Festival took second place to the annual Lambing Service. A pen of lambs at the back of the church bleated their own accompaniment as we sang 'The Lord's my shepherd' or listened to the parable of the Lost Sheep.

These days, many of us have to work a little harder to connect with images of sheep and shepherding, but it is hard to overestimate how important the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd was to the early church. The image of Christ watching over sheep as he carries another back on his shoulders is one of the most commonly occurring in the Roman catacombs. So what was it about the image that spoke so powerfully?

This chapter comes as a continuation of Jesus' response to the Pharisees and leaders who drove the man born blind out of the synagogue (John 9.34-35). Jesus now uses the traditional 'sheep and shepherd' image for Israel and its leaders, both to critique their behaviour and to describe himself as the Good Shepherd.

In the villages of Jesus' day, it was common for families to have a small number of sheep which were kept inside the home at night, or in small sheepfolds which households might share as they might also collectively hire or appoint a shepherd. At daybreak these shepherds would call their own sheep to them, the sheep responding

Session Three: 'Light'

John 9.1–41

As you begin today's session you may wish to light some candles or tealights and place them around the room where you are meeting. Spend some time 'just looking' and notice how new and different kinds of light from that which we are used to show us our surroundings in new ways and from fresh angles.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we study and discuss your word, help us to see afresh the light of the world and all that he illuminates, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

First Reading of John 9.1–41

Second Reading of John 9.1–41

Reflection 1

What words, pictures or ideas stand out for you in this passage? Share with one another briefly what has drawn your attention.

Reflection 2

The 'light of the world' is one of the most important metaphors John uses in his gospel to help his readers understand and respond to the identity of Jesus. Although the symbol is used earlier in John it comes especially to the fore in chapter 9 and the story of the opening of the eyes of the man born blind. In v5 Jesus uses the description of himself as the light of the world almost as a title over the whole story of the chapter. If we are to understand what this story is telling us then we must look for the way in which light (and especially *the* light) is present or absent through the various scenes.

Having read through the passage twice now take a look at Duccio di Buoninsegna's *Jesus Opens the Eyes of a Man Born Blind* (1311) which was part of scenes from the life of Christ painted on the back of his 'Maesta' in Siena. Spend a few moments looking and then talking with each other about what you see and how it relates to the biblical account. Duccio's portrayal of the story is unusual in that we see

the blind man in the opening and final scenes of the story. In the picture's original context the next painting to the right is the Transfiguration of Jesus (see Luke 9.28-36; Mark 9.2-8; Matthew 17.1-8) so the blind man's sight is illuminated by the sight of the transfigured Jesus. What Duccio emphasises in this painting, however, is the transformation of the blind man through his encounter with Jesus, with what follows and how he responds.

Questions

1. How does Duccio help us to see the change that has occurred in the blind man's life? What does he particularly emphasise in the way he has portrayed the 'before' (or more accurately 'during') and 'after' of the man's experience?
2. v2: As the story begins it appears the blind man is the object of a conversation by others (the disciples), not someone who is spoken to and with. But once Jesus is involved he immediately becomes the subject, a full participant in a conversation and an encounter in which he becomes a vital player. Can you think of situations where bringing the light of Christ to another has involved this movement from object to subject? How do you see yourself? Is it easier to think of yourself as someone who is *spoken* about by others or someone in conversation with Jesus?
3. v5: Jesus' presence provides light for the work of God in the story. Today we understand that light to be present with us by the Holy Spirit at work in the church and in the world. Thinking about the story as a whole, where do you see the light illuminating what is in darkness? How might the work that God gives us to do bring the light of Christ to others? What are the challenges and opportunities of this 'enlightening' that you face?
4. vv11, 15, 25, 30: The man tells the story of what Jesus has done for him four times. What are the results of his testimony to his encounter with Jesus? John presents the man as the perfect example of someone bearing witness to Jesus and putting faith in him. The man tells his story in different ways, to different people, with differing results. How does his attitude change as he does so? Can you point to times or situations in your life when you've particularly sensed the light of Christ? How reluctant or eager were you to testify to that light in the face of opposition?

5. In the 'prologue' to John's gospel, John tells us that 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it' (John 1.5). In what ways does the darkness attempt to overcome the light through the various encounters between the man, his parents, the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders? How does the light resist the darkness and what can we learn from that as we seek to be the light of the world (Matthew 5.14)?
6. Jesus' actions cause confusion and division (among the neighbours, with the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders) about his identity. This division surfaces first with the man born blind (though he is having none of it!) and then with his parents (though they don't want any of it either!). Eventually (v41) the division is lit up in the conversation between Jesus and Pharisees. How do you feel about getting drawn into the problems that others have with how they view Jesus? What is the best way of responding to this and how might this story help us?

Creative Devotion

Resources: A light-up globe and some stick-on stars or dots, or a map of the world and small candles. Post-it notes or small pieces of paper and pencils/pens.

Pray for the places and people in the world who live in darkness through war, division, oppression, poverty, abuse, addiction, homelessness. Put a sticker on the place(s) for which you would like to pray on the globe or the map. Light a candle and pray for God's light to shine on the dark corners of the world. You may like to write prayers to lay around the globe/map.

Closing Prayer

Spend some time in quiet praying about situations that you know about in your own life or that of others (locally or globally) where the light of Christ is needed. Pray for those who will respond (positively and negatively) to the presence of Jesus, the light of the world.

James Blandford-Baker