

It can be very hard for a teacher to be taught by others. I speak as a former teacher and I suppose in a way I still am both a teacher and difficult to teach. In this most wonderful gospel story the teachers just cannot accept that this lesser mortal, this man born blind and, in the culture of the day born sinful – someone somewhere in his family line has sinned, should have something to teach them. It's a gospel against dogmatism, blindly following someone else's teaching just because they've said so. It raises all the dangers for a teacher that others may know better than they do, that they may lose control and respect and power if the truth gets out in others. Cue resistance to synodality and so on. There'll be chaos if we let the lesser mortals have their say.

But Jesus does let the man have his say, indeed seeks him out to make sure he is all right, this man ostracised by others, an image of the early Christian community as it is shunned by the Synagogue. And as the man speaks so Christ, otherwise unmentioned, is revealed in him. And this is a lesson for us as much post- as pre- resurrection. Remember those disciples in the upper room and at Emmaus, they remained blind until Jesus seeks them out again and opens their eyes to the truth of his presence. He lets them have their space too, gives them space to find him, to be surprised by grace. And like the man born blind we can do this for one another, take a step back from dogmatism, from already knowing all the answers, and allow each other to reveal something of God, of Christ, to each other which would otherwise remain hidden.

In a wonderful metaphor I heard yesterday someone spoke of the way geese fly in the slipstream of the leader; for a short time it makes life easier for the one who follows, but what also needed to be said was that the leader in such a flock takes turns at leading and allows other members of the flock to take over in lead position – in this sense we are called to take turns at flying in the slip stream of one another. One might see Jesus in today's story as allowing the blind man to have his chance of leading now that he can see. Indeed one commentator calls him a theologian, a revealer of God. This is a baptism into a whole new way of being – a graced departure from that old dogmatic self which always knows best. I haven't quite got there yet and to de-romanticise this imagery, and perhaps give us all hope, I remember watching a flock of Pink footed Geese, 'Pink feet', coming in to land at Titchwell in north Norfolk in autumn after their long flight from Greenland or Iceland. As they come in in perfect V formation, one of the birds behind the leader leans over and bites the wing of a bird in the neighbouring line – just give me some space please, you're getting too close, perhaps. It takes time to learn how both to lead and to fly gratefully, gracefully, in the slipstream of one another. It's why we need a Lent before coming in to land and experiencing resurrection.

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