

PENTECOST 23 2024 All Souls **EYES WIDE OPEN** dtw (8am only)

O God, you give light to the blind and comfort to the sorrowing; hear the cry of your people and lead us home to our true country where you live and reign in glory everlasting. Amen

Jesus wanted his disciples to rise above the limitations of what they saw in human and worldly terms, to the vision of the Kingdom. In our gospel today we have the story of Bartimaeus, a blind man, who is restored to sight by Jesus. For the writer, Bartimaeus was also a symbol for the way the faithful community was being called to follow Jesus. Given the invitation, the blind man threw off his cloak, 'sprang up and came to Jesus'; that's a pretty big thing to do when you're blind! We are called to see Jesus clearly, to throw off unnecessary baggage and follow. We are called as the Christian Community to have our vision of Jesus restored and clarified in order to move on. So much of what consumes our time as a church simply doesn't matter. There is Kingdom business to be done. We all need to take the time to perceive the secrets of the Kingdom by scratching the surface of life. We need to take heart and get up because Jesus is calling – calling us to Kingdom possibilities, Kingdom enterprises, Kingdom building, Kingdom healing.

A man whose eyes and ears were truly opened was William Wilberforce who lived from 1759-1833. He led a 20 year fight in Britain to end the slave trade and just before his death he saw the institution of slavery abolished throughout the British colonies. He also called for the reformation of society advocating for child labour laws, campaigning for the education of the blind and the deaf and founding organisations as diverse as the RSPCA and the National Gallery. Good causes, it has been said, stuck to him like pins to a magnet. The legacy of Wilberforce is tied to his relationship with John Newton. Newton was an ex-slave trader who turned to holy orders and the abolitionist movement. He became Wilberforce's spiritual counsellor and set him on the path of service to humanity. It was only after Wilberforce underwent what he later described as his "great change" or embrace of Christianity, that he became a reformer. It was in the House of Commons, Newton stated, that Wilberforce could best serve God. The classic hymn *Amazing Grace* was written by John Newton, "I once was blind but now I see".

True sight is linked intrinsically to justice, human rights and liberation.

The evil of modern-day slavery, of course, still exists and there are many other abuses countenanced by today's society which truly demand our accurate perception and action. The institution of slavery alone should expose those who adhere to biblical literalism. It is accepted as a given in both the OT and NT and by Jesus and Paul because it was a cultural norm, not because it was moral; it was not. Hence the need for a review of all cultural biblical injunctions and 'norms' that have well passed their use-by

dates. The Liturgical Commission seriously needs to revamp the Australian Lectionary for the same reasons. There are too many readings on Sundays and weekdays that contain language and images that are simply unhelpful and unedifying for Christian life today. (and I'm not talking about 'sin'. The wages of sin remain the same!)

Let us pray.

Lord, give us true sight, insight, perception, vision. Shake off the scales from our eyes, our blinkers, logs and splinters. Help us to see with your eyes all the divine possibilities that you have in store. Bring us out of darkness into your clear shining light. Amen.