

“Let Me See Again”
Mark 10:46-52

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When I was about six or seven years old, I went with my parents to New York City to visit my grandparents. It must have been around Thanksgiving because I have a memory of walking with my father near the entrance to Central Park. I saw for the first time the horse drawn carriages lined up along Fifth Avenue waiting to be hired. I was surprised to see that the horses were wearing things near their eyes. My father explained that they were called blinders and were placed on the horse's heads to keep them focused on what was in front of them. I was concerned for the horses and convinced that the blinders must have been uncomfortable and confining. My father assured me that the horses didn't mind - that they only needed to see the single direction where they were going. I wasn't convinced and continued to question my father about the blinders and how they must hinder the horse's sight. He finally lost patience with my concern for the horses. He firmly stated, in a tone of voice that meant he was finished with the conversation that the horses needed to wear the blinders to get their work done.

In our scripture this morning Jesus teaches us about spiritual blinders. The story begins as Jesus and his disciples are leaving Jericho. As they leave the town, they come across Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, who is sitting by the side of this road. When Bartimaeus hears that it is Jesus who is passing by he shouts out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The crowd immediately asks him to be quiet, but he cries out even louder: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" When Jesus hears him, he stands still and asks for the people to bring Bartimaeus to him. Throwing off his cloak, Bartimaeus sprang up and went to Jesus. Jesus asks him a very powerful question: "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus answers saying: "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus tells him that he can go for his faith has made him well. Scripture tells us that Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way.

What a story! At first glance we see that it is a story about a healing. But when we stop to mull it over, we discover it is also a story about the radical political implications that Jesus creates with his ministry and the invitation to follow him on the way. It is a story about God's truth and how that truth rattles the walls of the domination system of the day and the interior lives of those who

are listening. It is a story about opening our eyes to the power of the living God and how that power changes our lives and renews us.

Ironically, it is the blind man, Bartimaeus, who really sees who Jesus is. When Jesus is passing on the road, Bartimaeus cries out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." We are told that the people tell him to be quiet, but he refuses. At first we assume that the people want Bartimaeus to be quiet because he is making too much noise. But, in studying the text it becomes clear that the reason they want him to be quiet is because he is making a huge political statement. By identifying Jesus as the Son of David, Bartimaeus noisily implies that Jesus is Lord or Son of God. This was radical and politically dangerous because in that era the Emperor, Caesar Augustus, was the only one who could be called Lord or Son of God. Claiming that Jesus was Lord was high treason. Bartimaeus saw the truth about Jesus and announced it to the world.

Today is Reformation Sunday - the Sunday we remember Martin Luther and his efforts to reform the church. Like Bartimaeus, Luther was courageous and bold as he sought to bring truth to the church.

As a monk, Martin Luther studied the scriptures carefully. The more he learned, the more he worried about the corruptions he saw in the Catholic Church. In an attempt to bring about reform and bring the Word of God to the people, Martin Luther nailed his 99 theses on the church door. It was radical and politically risky. Luther was excommunicated from the Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformation was founded. Without Luther, we would not be the church we are today.

The story about Bartimaeus is not just about the political implications of Jesus' radical ministry. It is also about regaining sight and spiritual insight in our understanding of faith. In this healing, Bartimaeus plays an important roll. The healing is not one sided. Jesus is clear that it is Bartimaeus' faith that has made him well. Bartimaeus can see again because he sees God's way in the world. The darkness that covers his eyes is a darkness that blinds him from seeing God clearly. Through Jesus, Bartimaeus sees that the way of Jesus' teaching is what is true and real - not the way of the world.

The summer I was 17, I played in an orchestra that toured Italy for a number of weeks playing in churches and town halls. One day when we were near Assisi, I went to the ruins of a castle with a few friends. At one point we walked across the ramparts and entered a tower at the corner of the castle grounds. It was an old tower made of stone that contained a narrow circular stone staircase with no lighting. It was dark when we entered and as we climbed the stairs, it got darker and darker. The only way we could find our way was to

feel the cold rock of the walls that enclosed the staircase. To be honest, climbing into the darkness with no idea where I was going was scary. The higher we went the narrower the staircase got so I had to stoop down to keep going. Suddenly, I turned a corner and saw sun light through a tiny door opening. As we walked through it we were blessed with the most glorious view of Umbria. We could see for miles. The light danced off the green trees and tiny villages gracing the valleys that lay below us. It was breath taking. I had never seen anything like it. In the awe of the moment, we were silent and then I heard one man say: "It's like being born again." Out of the darkness we see the light – we see the glory of God's gift to us.

To travel on the way with Jesus means that we need to open our eyes to God's way – the way of peace and justice, compassion and understanding, love and forgiveness, kindness and thanksgiving – the way of healing and wholeness, diversity and inclusivity, joy and hope. While Jesus is our teacher, our guide, we have to do our part. We have to engage in the journey by paying attention to the Holy. Like Bartimaeus, our faith will make us well. Our faith will show us Jesus' truth. It is something to pay attention to day after day so our sight remains clear instead of dim and blinded.

As I was walking with a friend on Friday, she told me that she was driving out of a long driveway about 5 o'clock on Thursday evening. It was over cast but as she rounded a corner a ray of light broke through the clouds shining on a glorious maple tree. In an instant, the yellow, orange and red leaves were lit up in astonishing glory. It was so breathtaking that she had to stop the car and look. Caught in this sacred moment, she found herself giving thanks to God for this gift of light and color and beauty. It was a moment of glory that she recognized as a gift from heaven. She could have missed the gift. She could have been in a rush and driven right past this holy moment. Or, she could have seen it but not stopped because she did not care to see God's hand in the light. But, like Bartimaeus, she saw a truth and acknowledged it. She took a moment to stop her busy life and be on God's way. She choose to see the truth before her.

It is the same for us. We are all invited to see God's truth shine is our world. May God be with us on the journey. Amen.

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