

Jesus open my eyes!

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Mark 10:46-52

In what ways are we blind? What is it that Jesus wants us to see that we so often miss? This is really what most of the gospel has been about for the past several weeks. The disciples can see, but they continue to be blind to who and what Jesus is about. They haven't yet understood, "seen" if you will what the kingdom and Jesus' ministry is really about.

Notice there are two stories of healing and blindness in Mark all located near these passages. Mark 8:22 is the story of the blind man in Bethsaida who is not named and his friends bring him to Jesus. It takes Jesus two efforts to successfully heal his blindness. In today's passage, those around Jesus block Bartimaeus from coming to Jesus. Now it should be clear that at least to Mark's community Bartimaeus is well known since he is specifically identified. This is very unusual in the gospels. I wonder if he was well known because after being healed he follows Jesus on the way. It is important to note that the Greek says followed him on the way, which was used to identify those who followed Jesus. The word is not road as in some translations. The Greek strongly hints that he became a follower, a disciple.

Of even greater importance is that Bartimaeus is one, who even though blind, sees Jesus for who he is. He names him, "Son of David have mercy on me" is his cry. Bartimaeus ties Jesus back to his Old Testament roots. He has incredible faith in Jesus and this faith persists through those who try to block him from approaching Jesus. Jesus states "Go your faith has made you well." Unlike the other blind man, there is no touch, no saliva, just the words and he is healed. In short Bartimaeus even though blind at the start of this passage "gets it" even if the disciples cannot see what is right in front of them.

The Wednesday night bible study was looking the rejection of Jesus stories in the gospels this wee. The people of Nazareth Jesus' home town were blind as to who Jesus was. Wasn't this Joseph the carpenter's son? How he could he be anybody important? He was so familiar they just could not accept that he was something so exceptional and he could do only a few healings in town. Then he moved on. His friends and relatives were blind, they could not see him as anything more than one of them.

Over the past several weeks we have the disciples who seem to be blind and deaf to what Jesus has been telling them is going to happen. Also Jesus has kept his identity a secret for all of Mark, often saying to not tell anyone. So the theme of "seeing" who Jesus for who he really is, is an important theme in Mark.

That is the problem with blindness and why Jesus uses this as a metaphor so often. Being blind to the kingdom. Being blind to the presence of Christ. Being blind to those in-breakings of the Spirit that happen all the time if we but notice. This prompts one to ask how might we be blind to Christ's presence here with us? How might we be blind to Christ's presence within us?

Our Stewardship insert talks about someone who almost missed her chance at a huge revelation, one that changed her life.¹

"It was Saturday afternoon. I was taking a solitary walk in the historic area of Philadelphia when I encountered a handicapped beggar on the street. He was sitting with his legs sprawled. His tattered clothes and unkempt appearance repelled me. I tried to ignore him, hoping not to be noticed. But that was not to be. He yelled out, "Sister, stop and talk to me!" I paused, knowing God was watching and waiting for my response.

I reluctantly approached him to look squarely in his face. As I bent down he grabbed a cross hanging around my neck and asked, "Are you a Christian?" Stunned, I replied "Yes." I asked if he, too, was a Christian and he replied, "Oh yes, and let me tell you everything God has done for me." What flowed out of his soul was a litany of blessings, healings, provision and gratitude for never being without the necessities of life. He then asked my name and for my prayers. I reciprocated. My tears welled up as the encounter drew to a close. I put money into his cup and said goodbye.

But he wasn't finished with me. As I walked away he yelled out, "Mary, I love you I stopped dead in my tracks. This broken, gentle man was a messenger from God! It was as if God were directly speaking to me and saying, "Mary, can't you see that I am the source, the giver of every good and necessary thing in your life? You have cried out many times asking for mercy and blessing and I have granted them to you. And above all, I love you."

This profound encounter 17 years ago changed me. No longer do I give or serve out of obligation or duty, but out of a deep gratitude for God's generosity. Giving of my life and my resources has become pure joy.

Mark 10:46-52 tells the story of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar who was not afraid to cry out to Jesus for mercy and healing. Nothing would stop him from asking for what he needed. Jesus heard his cry of faith and healed him. In return, Bartimaeus became a follower. Both Bartimaeus and the man I encountered were deeply aware of God's mercy and provision in their lives and were so thankful.

Let us be bold and cry out to God when we are in need! For God's other name is Giver. Our new name will be Thankful."

¹ This is taken from the TENS stewardship insert for October 24, 2015.

This insert touched me more than any of the other ones for this Stewardship campaign. Like Bartimaeus it is a call to stop, take notice, listen be open to the moving of the Spirit.

So take this passage home and spend a few moments in meditation on this suggestion. The spiritual director in my wants to suggest an Ignatian colloquy. This means you take the passage, imagine yourself in the passage like I have done with you on guided meditations. Then when you get to the point where Jesus says, "What do you want?" answer him with a prayer about your own blindness, whatever it might be. Talk to Jesus tell him what you want. Then let him open your eyes to whatever he wants to show you. It might happen right then or sometime in the next few days, when you least expect it. Possibly something like the women in the stewardship insert today. Be daring, take the chance to talk to Jesus in prayer. Who knows what the answer may be. No matter what you learn remember to say thank you at the end of your meditation for God is the Giver of all that we have and all that we are.