

Wesley United Methodist Church      Rev. Beverly E Stenmark  
October 28, 2018  
Title: On the Mend: Healing Vision  
Scripture: Job 42:1-5  
Mark 10:46-52

“The late singer and actor Gordon MacRae told this story: It seems that Arnold Palmer was invited to come to a convention of blind golfers. He asked the golfers how they were able to know what direction to hit the ball. One blind golfer explained that the caddy went out ahead of him with a little bell which he would ring as he stood near the hole. The blind golfer would then hit the ball toward the sound of the bell. Arnold asked how well it worked, and the blind golfer said that it worked so well he was willing to take on Arnold Palmer for a round of golf; and just to make it interesting, was willing to bet Palmer ten thousand dollar he could beat him. Well, this just blew Palmer’s mind. He pressed him, but the man insisted he was willing to be that amount on his ability to beat Palmer. So, the deal was struck. Palmer said, ‘OK. What time do we tee off?’ And the blind man said, ‘10:30 ... tonight!’”<sup>i</sup>

Suddenly the perspective has changed and the one with the seemingly obvious advantage is suddenly the one at a disadvantage. It really does seem to depend upon your point of view, the perspective from which you look at a situation.

In today’s scripture we hear about two people who had their vision changed dramatically. For one, Bartimaeus, the change was what we would think about when we think of a change of vision. Bartimaeus was a blind beggar. He depended daily upon the charity of those coming by him for donations that would help keep him alive.

One day as he was sitting by the roadside, begging for help, he heard a commotion. He learned that it was Jesus of Nazareth coming toward him. He began to shout out to Jesus; calling upon Jesus to have mercy on him. Somehow, he knew that there was something different about this man coming toward him.

We don't know what he was told, but he called out, "Jesus, Son of David." The people around him ordered him sternly to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly. I don't know why they were telling him to be quiet.

It is possible it was because of the title he used when he called out to Jesus. He called Jesus, "Son of David" referring back to King David and recognizing Jesus as the potential ruler of Israel. In this climate where the Jewish people were oppressed by Roman occupation, the way he calls out to Jesus borders on treasonous and that may have been why the people around him ordered him to be quiet – not wanting to draw attention to his proclamation.

It is also possible that they were telling him to be quiet because he was a beggar, one of the lowest of the lowest, a man without status, a man who had no right to call out to Jesus, to request the attention of the increasingly famous teacher and healer. But Jesus stopped and called for Bartimaeus to come to him. The name Bartimaeus has two parts to it. "Bar" meaning son, son of Timaeus. Timaeus means honor or value. Bartimaeus is a valued child of God and Jesus stops and calls Bartimaeus to him.

It struck me as a little strange that Jesus called for Bartimaeus to come to him, rather than Jesus going over to him which would have been easier for the blind man. Some years ago, I had the privilege of studying for

a brief time in California with Ched Myers, a Biblical scholar, teacher, and author. In his book, “Binding the Strong Man”, Ched describes this story as a “paradigmatic story of discipleship.” If that is the case, it would explain why Mark tells us Jesus called Bartimaeus to come to him. Jesus calls each of us to come to him.

Leaving behind his cloak, Bartimaeus sprang up and went to Jesus. Leaving his cloak behind is significant. His cloak would have served two important functions for him. At night, he would have wrapped it around himself to keep warm. During the day, his cloak would have been spread out on the ground to collect the coins and scraps of bread that people tossed to him. It would have made it possible for him to find and contain them and not just lose them to the surrounding area. Bartimaeus left his most important possession behind and went to Jesus.

Jesus doesn’t make the assumption that he knows what Bartimaeus wants. He asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” Earlier in the chapter, in last week’s reading, Jesus asked his disciples James and John the same question. Their response was that they wanted him to let them sit on Jesus’ right and left side when he came into his glory. They were asking for positions of power.

When asked the same question, Bartimaeus responded, “My teacher, let me see again.” You would think that this would be the obvious answer, but I think Jesus wanted to be sure that Bartimaeus knew what he was asking for. Apparently at some point, Bartimaeus had been a sighted person. He knew what it was like to be able to see.

But there was more to this healing than simply restoration of physical eye sight. If Bartimaeus were healed, his whole life would change, and maybe in ways he hadn’t anticipated. He would no longer be able to sit by

the side of the road, asking others for help. Now, he would be responsible to provide for himself. He would need to find a job, a way to support himself. No longer would he be limited in where he could go, counting on someone to lead him to his destination.

With nothing to lose and everything to gain, Bartimaeus is free to be free. When Jesus restored his eyesight, he said to him, “Go, your faith has made you well.” First Jesus called Bartimaeus to “come” to him. Now he is telling him to “go.” He is free to go wherever he wants. Previously limited to going where people would lead him, now Bartimaeus can go wherever he wants.

Instead of running around exploring and celebrating his freedom to go wherever he wants, Bartimaeus chooses instead to follow; but this time he will follow Jesus. This is why Ched Myers calls this a “paradigmatic story of discipleship.” This poor blind man is the model of a disciple, because unlike the disciples who were still blinded by their aspirations of power, by their ideas of who Jesus was, and what kind of liberation he would bring, Bartimaeus knew that he was blind, and he wanted to be healed.

Job also claims to be cured of his blindness, but it is a different kind of blindness. “When Job finally gets to confront God, his questions fall away, and his attitude changes. Once he carefully tiptoed around God, following the rules as though he could control God’s action by spiritual correctness.” But after he challenges God, “his eyes are opened, and he is transformed. He acknowledges God’s sovereignty and sees what he could not see before: The life of faith is not about blind obedience. Job begins to grasp the greatness of God the Creator who engages with the created. He realizes that it is one thing to hear about God and quite a different thing to experience God, to see God.”<sup>ii</sup>

Job proclaims that he before he had heard about God, but now he could see God.

The story is told of a bold unbeliever who was lecturing a group on the folly of religious faith in general and the Christian faith in particular. At the close of the presentation, the speaker invited people to ask any questions they might have. "In the audience was the town drunkard, who had been converted to Christ. In response to the invitation, the converted alcoholic came up front, took out an orange, peeled it, and ate it without comment.

"The speaker asked if he had a question for him. After downing the last segment of orange, the convert turned to the unbeliever and asked, 'Was the orange I just ate sweet or sour?' Angrily, the speaker replied, '... How can I know whether it was sweet or sour when I never tasted it?' To this the converted drunkard retorted, "And how can you know anything about Christ if you have not tried Him?"<sup>iii</sup>

Job had his eyes opened, when he experienced God in ways he could not have imagined. In our lives, we often question God but sometimes we are fortunate to discover that God is beyond our understanding, beyond our questioning. However, God is not beyond our experiencing. God is present in all of creation; God is present in all of our lives, and God is present with us in all of our suffering, as well as in our rejoicing and celebration.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus still asks us today. Job wanted to understand and present his case. The disciples wanted power. Blind Bartimaeus wanted to see. Bartimaeus begins to follow Jesus, not looking to lead, but to follow. Bartimaeus is not looking to be important but

he is looking to do the important thing – to see, to know, and to follow Christ.

By the end, Job demonstrates a humility appropriate to our relationship to God. His story is further evidence that blind Bartimaeus' approach to Jesus is preferable to that of Jesus' disciples. Jesus shows interest in those that others cast aside. Jesus shows the ability to heal and take away whatever blindness is preventing us from full life. Jesus' focus is on providing a way forward, a new life that we may not be able to see when we are blinded by the circumstances of our lives, or our perception of the way things are.

There can be benefits to being blind to the circumstances around us. Blindness can protect us from the harsh realities of life. If we are blind to the number of people around us who are hungry, it is easier for us to enjoy the fine food on our table. If we are blind to those who are unemployed and unable to provide warm and safe housing for their families it makes it easier for us to enjoy our warm homes and take for granted the many things we have. If we are blind to the number of people without health insurance and dependable health care, it is easy for us to take for granted the times we can call a doctor when we are not feeling well.

It can be scary to ask God to help us to see. It can mean seeing things that we prefer not to know about. It can mean that we might have to take action that we have been avoiding. If God helps us to see our negative attitude toward a particular individual, it might mean that we would need to be open to ways to change our attitude and our behavior. In a little over a week, we will head to the polls to vote for our choice for state and local positions of leadership. If we ask God to help us see, we may need to try to understand the viewpoint of those with whom we disagree.

In the last 24-48 hours, the news has been filled with the stories of two men who, I believe, are blind. They can see physically, but they are so blinded by prejudice, partisanship, perceptions of people or something else that one of them allegedly sent potential bombs to over a dozen public figures with whom he disagrees. The other, yelling words of hatred, opened fire on a group of Jewish people worshipping God and celebrating the birth of a baby girl. There are many people who are blind in ways that are not physical.

If Jesus were to ask you, "What do you want me to do for you?" how would you answer? It might be good to spend some time thinking about that. My prayer is that we will all ask God to help us see in ways that bring wholeness, healing, and fullness of life to all God's children.

"Faith is the conviction of things not seen. It may involve rising and going blindly in the direction" that God leads us. We may find ourselves responding as Job did, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you." Faith is following Christ, even when we cannot see where the way leads.

"We are all beggars, poor beggars lacking sight, dependent on others, struggling along, suffering, and often unable to see the source of blessing right in front of us. But God watches over us; God sees us; God in Christ waits to offer us mercy. All we have to do is get up and go in the direction of Christ. When we can finally see the One who calls us, then we, like Bartimaeus are to follow, and in our following, be made whole."<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Hewett, James S. editor *Illustrations Unlimited* Tyndale, Ill. C.1988 p.274

<sup>ii</sup> *Upper Room Disciplines 2018*, p.352

<sup>iii</sup> Hewett, p.190

<sup>iv</sup> URD, p.358