

All Saints

October 24, 2021

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It's another hot, dry and dusty day in the town of Jericho when Jesus, his disciples and the large crowd following them makes their way on the road out of town. Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, is squatting at the side of the road as the crowd rumbles past. Over the noise of shuffling feet and excited chatter, this beggar man cries out above the sound when he hears that it is Jesus passing by. "Have mercy on me, Son of David" in his distraction he yells loud enough for the crowd to order him to shut up.

Jesus stops in his tracks and orders the man to come to him. Bartimaeus leaps up, probably tripping, maybe falling on his face before coming to meet Jesus, who asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Let me see again, " he replies. With just 4 short words from the blind man, Jesus sees that his faith is so strong that he restores his sight and the man, once blind, now follows Jesus with the crowd out of town.

That's the last we hear of Bartimaeus. How long did he tag along, was he there, still following, a few days later when Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time? Was he one, now with eyes to see, watching Jesus's painful death on the cross? Was the miracle of sight restored enough to sustain that display of faith for the rest of his days, becoming an example for others? We'll never know.

What we do know is that today the Bartimaues's of this world continue to raise their voices as Jesus goes by but more often than not the crowd has it's way and stifles their cries.

While those who beg for healing are all around us I think it's really the crowd that's truly blind. All of us, myself included, are most often the blinded ones. We go about our lives blocking out the light sporting our dark glasses. My favorite pair of Pharisee 5000s, does a pretty good job of that.

We're surrounded by a constant barrage of hurting people who cry out daily on the various forms of media at our disposal. Reports of devastating floods, fires, earthquakes, famine, endless wars, refugees, murderous bombings, raging diseases and on and on it goes. Yet, far too often we walk the earth refusing to see, hear or feel the plight of our fellow earthly travelers unless it hits us personally between the eyes.

It's not only the headline grabbing tragedies that we fail to respond to. The Jesus in you and me becomes deaf and blinded to the hungry, un-employed, homeless, lonely and less fortunate right out there on main street.

It's all about the eyes. I looked at the references in the back of my bible and discovered 120 places where the words blind, eyes and to see are used. When teaching whitewater kayaking, a tough concept, when running a challenging obstacle filled portion of a river, is to look where you want to go, not at the danger.

Bartimaeus looked, although he physically couldn't see, looking to Jesus is where he wanted to go and avoided the danger of what he might encounter on the way. Anyone who has ever taught school knows the internal joy that comes when a student suddenly gets it. The light goes and in that "Aha" moment, as what was once formally hidden finally comes into view.

Our reading from Jeremiah tries to rally the people living in Judah, to look towards what God will do in returning those in exile back to the land of promise. Instead of focusing on the plight of the separated he chooses to see the positive. God will lead the lame and the blind in a straight path in which they shall not stumble.

Today's psalm proclaims, My eyes are ever looking to the Lord, for he shall pluck my feet out of the net.

What Bartimaeus got but the crowd couldn't see is that despite his beggar status or his handicap Jesus was approachable. Jesus recognizes this attribute as does Paul in his letter to the Hebrews.

Paul instructs the Hebrews that although they have had a line of priests to intercede to God on their behalf these have been limited by death. Jesus instead is eternal because he continues forever as a channel to God who, in turn, is always approachable.

A blind beggar by the side of the road gets it. He has the nerve, the stones if you will, to reach out to Jesus as he walks by. Jesus calls it what it is, faith. What then, holds you and I back from calling out as Jesus walks by, either for the healing of our own condition or of those around us?

Matthew, in the 17th chapter, tells us that Jesus has words with his disciples after they fail to have the power to cast out a demon from an epileptic boy who throws himself into a fire. He tells them it's a faith thing. If they had faith even as small as a tiny mustard seed they could say to a mountain move from here to there and it would move and nothing would be impossible for you.

Nothing then is impossible with God. Faith is gained piece by piece. We enter a dark room, flick the switch, and the light goes on. We may, or may not, have an understanding of how electricity works but by faith we expect it to happen. Approaching God may not always result in our wants being fulfilled in the way we perceive them but by exercising that ounce of faith we can and will move mountains.

I'm reminded of the Morning Prayer words, I read a time or two a week, from the Second Song of Isaiah. "Seek the Lord while he wills to be found, call upon him when he draws near. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor my ways your ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts"

Call upon the Lord when he draws near. Like Bartimaeus, that's what we're called to do. Open our eyes, take off the dark glasses and respond with empathy and compassion to the needs of our neighbors far and near and yes, even to our own needs and blindness. That tiny seed of Jesus inside each of us has the power to move both mountains and molehills when we dare to approach our Lord.

Let me close with the words from the Collect listed under Proper 11, found on page 231 of the prayer book. May they help to separate ourselves from the crowd that tries to silence the cries of the poor of faith and spirit:

Almighty God, fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking. Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask, through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen, Alleluia