

23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Job 42:1-6, 10-17

Psalm 34:1-8, (19-22)

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 10:46-52

There are lots of different ways to use the verb 'to see.' We can use it literally as in "do you see what is in front of you?" and we can use it as a metaphor for "do you understand?" as in "Do you see what I mean?" In other words, do you get the point? We can also use it as a synonym for "observation" "Did you see the person that stole the book?" In that case, we may be asked to describe the person that we saw stealing the book. In that regard, I discovered that I am not particularly observant. If I 'see' something that happens that is a crime, I'm likely not to notice what the suspect was wearing, or what color hair she had, or how tall he was, or her ethnicity. If I'm startled by seeing a crime, I'm actually not very observant about the details. I generally can't remember any of the details. It's as if I didn't see anything at all. I would make a terrible witness in a court of law. My observation skills are pretty poor. I just don't 'see' any of the details that would be helpful. And then there are those who don't see what is clearly in front of them simply because they don't want to see. It doesn't matter how much information you give them, they don't want to see it...therefore, for them it doesn't exist. I expect all of you have had the experience of trying to convince someone of the truth and validity of something they don't want to see. It's futile and frustrating.

And so, in our gospel lesson this morning we have yet another healing miracle story and this one, like several others, is about a blind man having his sight restored. This is not an unusual healing miracle story, but it is unique in what it teaches us about Jesus and about his earthly mission and about people who see who he is and what he's doing and who choose to follow him.

As Jesus and his disciples enter the little town of Jericho, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, sitting by the side of the road, hears the crowd approaching and knows that these are people that are travelling with Jesus of Nazareth. He's heard about Jesus so he begins to call to him...rather persistently. The ones travelling with Jesus tell Bartimaeus to be quiet...to leave Jesus alone...not to bother him. Maybe they are trying to protect Jesus or keep him from being overwhelmed by needy people. But the more Jesus' entourage tries to shut Bartimaeus up, the louder he yells. He will not be silenced. Hope for him is on the horizon and he's not going to let this chance slip by. Bartimaeus is not just a blind man. He is a poor blind man. He has nothing

of value in his world. His profession of begging is disreputable. He has no one's respect. He's in the very lowest social class among the people in his village, so he has no social companionship. He can't fulfill the customary duties of the man in a household and consequently, he can't be the head of a household...no wife, no children, and as far as we know, no extended family around. He is alone. He's on the outside of the world in which he lives. He is excluded from all the customary social interactions that those around him are enjoying. And those social interactions are part of what keeps each and every one of us whole and healthy as we have discovered during these past twenty months of the isolation of the pandemic. We have some sense of what Bartimaeus' world is like. We can see his inner turmoil. We can see his suffering. We can see his loneliness and despair. He represents the poorest of the poor. He embodies the effects of social isolation because he belongs to the lowest strata of social class.

And yet, he can see what is about to happen. He calls to Jesus more insistently even as Jesus' followers tell him not to bother Jesus; to be quiet; to leave Jesus alone. But he knows without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus can restore his sight. He calls for Jesus to have mercy on him all the while he's being shouted down by the crowd with Jesus. But Bartimaeus won't stop. He sees what he has to do to get what he needs. In his persistence, he is confessing his faith in Jesus even before the healing takes place. And Jesus hears him and sees him.

Jesus tells his entourage to call to Bartimaeus and tell him to come. With that word from Jesus, these people who have been excluding Bartimaeus and telling him to be quiet are transformed. The naysayers become the cheerleaders and they get very excited telling Bartimaeus to come because Jesus is calling him. "Get up!" they say; "take heart" "He is calling you!"

Immediately, Bartimaeus threw off his cloak and sprang up and went toward Jesus. Let's pause for a moment to take a look at the meaning of this gesture with the cloak. In all likelihood, it is the only valuable thing Bartimaeus owns and he needs it to survive. He can snuggle up under it at night to stay warm while he sleeps. He can hide in its folds any morsels of food that are thrown to him. He can spread it out in front of him to collect the coins that he begs people to toss his way. The cloak is also the only thing he has that points to any kind of social status at all. Stop and think for a minute how Bartimaeus reacted to the news that Jesus wanted him to come closer. He threw off his cloak and sprang up and went to Jesus. In throwing off his cloak, he left behind everything of value that he had and walked toward Jesus. This is not just a healing story, this is also a call story. What he left behind...his cloak...was the sum total of all his worldly goods. His action is in stark contrast to the wealthy young prince who refused to give up all his riches to follow Jesus and ended up walking away from Jesus sad.

When Bartimaeus stands before Jesus, Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” This is the same question that Jesus asked James and John just last week, but the answer is much different. So is the motivation for making the request. James and John wanted to sit at Jesus’ right hand and his left hand and share in Jesus’ glory. Bartimaeus simply wants to be able to see again. He’s not asking to be elevated. He wants to be restored to good health. When it comes to understanding...to seeing...what Jesus’ mission is here on earth, James and John are far more blind than Bartimaeus.

And then Jesus tells Bartimaeus, “Go, your faith has made you well.” And immediately Bartimaeus regained his sight and began to follow Jesus. When Jesus says “Your faith has made you well” he’s not telling us that we can believe our way into wellness. He’s announcing that the healing for Bartimaeus has taken place at the hands of Jesus and the wholeness has come as a result of the faith Bartimaeus has that makes it possible to receive the healing. When Jesus says, “Go!” is that the same as “follow me”? It can be if the going is to tell others what he has seen and experienced in the One who is the Merciful Son of David. This healing story begins with Bartimaeus sitting by the side of the road...excluded from his small world. And it ends with Bartimaeus getting *on* the road and following Jesus and being part of the inner circle.

The movement also suggests more when we consider that “road” (or “way”) is a term Mark uses to indicate Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem and his suffering, the same “way” that he calls his followers to walk.

In Mark, Bartimaeus is not the first person seeking a miracle who approaches Jesus in faith, but he is the only one who winds up following Jesus, presumably straight into Jerusalem and into Jesus’ confrontation with the temple-based hierarchy.

It isn’t just that Bartimaeus can now ‘see’ with his restored eyesight, he is also able to ‘see’ that Jesus is calling him to follow. And Bartimaeus sees that following Jesus is now his calling in life. Perhaps he can even see what lies ahead for Jesus in Jerusalem and he chooses to believe in Him and follow Him anyway. In that respect, he has far more vision than most of the disciples who have yet to understand what Jesus will face in Jerusalem. Bartimaeus’ position has shifted from social outsider in his village to faithful insider among Jesus’ followers.

What do you see when you see Bartimaeus? And what do you see when you call to Jesus to answer your prayers? Do you see his call to you? Do you see what he’s asking you to leave behind in order to follow him? Do you see his love and care for you?

With God’s help you will see all this with clear eyes and a clear head!!

Thanks be to God. AMEN.