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22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 25) 24 & 25 October  
Mark 10:46-52

It was an early morning on the mountain that February. We awoke to fog that was so dense that we couldn't see the enormous trees outside of the living room window. (*On a side note* - Sewanee is known for its unusually heavy fog, which often appears without warning. The book campus book store even sells t-shirts that read 'Fog Happens.') Back to my story... it had been a long hard winter, and my friend and I had made the decision the night before that we were going to hike to the cross no matter what! We just needed to see that cross! Along a bluff atop the Cumberland Plateau, in Sewanee, TN, where I attended seminary, stands a beautiful, sixty foot tall, stark white memorial cross, where the view from the bluff is breathtakingly beautiful! After drinking a hot cup of coffee we bundled up in our fleece-lined parkas, donned our hiking boots and headed out the front door. As we stepped out onto the front porch, we stopped dead in our tracks, because the fog had thickened into what I would equate to as somewhat of a pea soup consistency. I said to my friend "Are we really going to do this!?" "Yes!" She said "Yes! We are! It will be well worth it!" We then slowly and cautiously made our way down the front steps and proceeded toward the direction of the cross. Taking one small step at a time, while continually encouraging one another we slowly slogged our way through the famous Sewanee fog. After about an hour, with the fog letting up just a tad bit, we finally approached the upward climb, which indicated that we were very close to our highly anticipated destination. As we reached the top of the bluff the fog ever so slowly began to lift and subtle rays of sunshine peered through the low clouds illuminating the large, white cross in all of its glory! We sat down on a small bench near the cross where we watched a brightly lit sky of muted oranges, pinks and golds bring the day to life. We could have elected no to go that foggy morning. It would have been easy to

stay in bed, under such weather conditions. But, something just assured us that the journey would be worth it. There is just something about seeing the cross and that beautiful sunrise that signified hope.

The walk through the woods on that foggy day was a little unsettling. In fact, there were instances that I simply could not see just a few feet in front of me. This experience made me aware of the intrinsic value of the gift of sight- something that is all too easy to take for granted. When I reflect upon the story of Bartimaeus, I imagine how frightening it must have been to be blind, and especially during the biblical period. The suffering of a blind person was often made worse because of the communal belief that the affliction was a result of sin. Therefore, a blind person would have been mistreated and marginalized by society, and would therefore really have no other option for survival but to become a beggar.

Marginalized and scorned by society – yes, but in spite of this truth when he had been told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, Bartimaeus boldly shouts out to Jesus with exuberant and fearless faith! He annoyed the people who surrounded him to the point that he was sternly told to be quiet! After all, he was just a blind beggar, an outcast of society. But with unyielding resolve he shouts out again, and this time even louder “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!” The Messianic title makes it clear about who Bartimaeus believes Jesus is. A dusty and treacherous road lined with hundreds of people under chaotic conditions, and a blind beggar has the audaciousness to shout out to Jesus with reckless abandon... and what happens...? What happens? Jesus stood still.

Now, it is important to keep in mind that Jesus and his disciples’ had just left Jericho, and they were proceeding on to Jerusalem, which was about a fifteen mile journey. Scholars tell us

that the road from Jericho to Jerusalem was arduous due to the rugged terrain, and in addition to this, the road was known to have been a haven for roaming thieves and bandits. Therefore, it is probable that the disciples, with all the best of intentions, were trying to hasten the journey to get Jesus safely to Jerusalem. They loved Jesus, and wanted to protect him, so the thought of stopping along this leg of the journey was likely not something the disciples would have wanted to do.

More importantly, however, is the fact that Jesus stops for the blind beggar, only hours before his Passion was to begin. He was aware of the political and religious tensions that were mounting, and still, in spite of the foreshadowing of what was to come, Jesus stops for a man who has been marginalized by society. This act of love demonstrated by Jesus is a beautiful illustration and revelation of the nature of God incarnate. He is always there for us, and always willing to hear us, no matter the circumstances.

When Jesus calls out for Bartimaeus, without any hesitation, Bartimaeus actually throws off his cloak, “springs up” and immediately goes to Jesus. By now the people, including the disciples, are likely astounded about what is taking place. The symbol, of Bartimaeus throwing off his cloak serves as a metaphor, in that he cannot bring the old remnants of his “blind and beggarly lifestyle to Jesus in the pursuit of a new situation.” It is as if he is throwing off his old life in preparation for new life by following Jesus. Jesus asks Bartimaeus “What do you want me to do for you?” In asking this Jesus recognizes him for his dignity in speaking out, as a human being, which is dignity given by God to all human beings.

When we speak out we exercise our faith in God who in Christ Jesus, who has come to save us with unfathomable mercy. Simply put “divine grace evokes and encourages our human

voice and our human will.” As observed by Fourth century Church Father and Archbishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, and I quote “God’s promises deliver on the condition of cooperation from us. God’s promise is not offered to sticks and stones, being inactive, but to human beings!” end quote. In the case of Bartimaeus, Jesus healed him for his persistent faith in action and for his dignity in speaking out.

Today’s narrative is quite a contrast from Mark’s account of the rich young ruler that we heard about just a few weeks ago. He walked away from Jesus pondering whether or not he could truly embrace a new life and follow Jesus. It’s difficult to let go. Some run from newness of life, while others embrace it. Bartimaeus wholly embraced his new life and he immediately followed Jesus. Living day to day in the love of Christ is filled with grace and peace, yet there will also be trials, social implications and challenges. Jesus makes this commission very clear as recorded in Matthew when Jesus states ‘if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it’ Matthew 9:23- 24.

Let us pray – *Heavenly Father, open the eyes of our hearts. Help us to hold fast to the knowledge and love of you in the midst of spiritual blindness and uncertainty. Be our light in the darkness and reveal to us the path of life everlasting, for your tender mercies sake. Amen.*