

## THE DESIRE TO SEE AGAIN

SCRIPTURE READINGS PSALM 34:1-8  
HEBREWS 7:23-28  
MARK 10:46-52

All of us have speculated about our five physical senses – hearing, taste, touch, smell, and sight – and have speculated which one is the most important, the one above the others we would not want to do without. Our senses are extremely important, and there are times when we take them for granted. My hunch is we would rank sight highly because we are dependent on our eyes, they are so vulnerable to disease, and many of us live with impaired vision. When my grandson Elijah was born prematurely and lived the first four months of his life in a hospital incubator, one great concern was the possibility that he might be blind. In the prenatal state, the eyes are the last to be formed in the human body. He now wears corrective lenses and he probably will for the rest of his life. Elijah and I have talked about this – conversations with four year olds are fascinating – and I have assured him, humbly of course, that very smart people wear eyeglasses. He is smarter than me already! Wearing glasses is one of the bonds between us.

The story of Jesus' healing of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, is one of the most moving in the gospels, and Mark tells it so simply that it is easy to overlook it. Jesus, as you recall from last week, had just settled the dispute among his disciples about who could be considered the greatest. James and John had pressed Jesus for the honor of sitting on either side of him when they entered the Kingdom. Jesus told them that those positions carried great responsibilities of sacrifice and service, and that the decision about who sits where in the Kingdom is up to God. The one who wants to be great must be the servant of the rest. Then Jesus proved his point in this succeeding story, his encounter with Bartimaeus.

The scene takes place in Jericho, the site of the great battle when Joshua and the Israelites had made the conquest of Canaan twelve centuries before. Jesus was making his own conquest of the city in a much more peaceful way. A huge crowd was following him which happened in a few days when Jesus made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The crowd was boisterous and noisy but one voice, the voice of Bartimaeus, rose above the clamor of the rest. He had heard that the great teacher, healer, and performer of miracles was present and causing the commotion. Sitting alone and miserable by the side of the road, mustering up his courage, he made his plaintive plea, "Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!"

Members of the crowd scolded him and told him to be quiet. They assumed Bartimaeus was trying to take advantage of the situation, capture the attention of Jesus and the crowd, and hit everyone up for some money. He was ruining the party! But Bartimaeus was not easily cowed, spoke up even more loudly, and repeated his cry to Jesus.

He had the audacity to interrupt Jesus but a careful reading of the gospel stories shows that the most important encounters Jesus had with people were usually interruptions. Jesus stopped, as he always did, and models for us that the most important part of our day can be the interruption that is probably influenced by the Holy Spirit when anything can happen. Jesus took the time to stop, and because he did not know where Bartimaeus was, he said to the crowd, "Call him."

The people called for him, told him to cheer up, and directed him to Jesus. Excitedly, he threw off his cloak, the symbol of his old life, jumped up, and made his way. Jesus stood before him and asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" He wanted Bartimaeus to take the responsibility to put his request into his own words. There was no hesitation, "Teacher, I want to see again." He wanted the eyesight that he had lost and now cherished, to be restored. "Go," Jesus told him, your faith has made you well." Bartimaeus was able to see at once and followed Jesus on the road.

We can only imagine when Bartimaeus must have felt! His desire to see again had been fulfilled. Several points about this story need to be emphasized. Bartimaeus took the risk to have his sight restored. He wanted to have a second chance to regain something important. He persevered against the odds and the strength of a taunting crowd. He responded positively when Jesus called for him. He gladly threw off the mantle of his old life. He took the responsibility to state what he desired. When the healing occurred, Jesus did not claim the credit but praised Bartimaeus' faith for opening the way to restoration. And the manner that Bartimaeus thanked Jesus was to follow him.

This story also teaches us that there are several different kinds of sight that we always need to rely on.

There is our physical sight to see the world, and it is good to be reminded how incredible this gift really is. To look into the face of someone we love, to watch a child at play, to gaze upon the beauty of God's creation, to catch a glimpse of a sunrise or sunset teach us how much we need to appreciate our sense of sight. But it is also good for us to know, especially those who have difficulty with our physical vision that there are other ways to see, too.

There is our emotional sight to look into the hearts of other people. Bartimaeus was able to look past the darkness of the crowd to discover the light of compassion in Jesus. In turn Jesus looked into the heart of Bartimaeus and saw the strength of his faith. This kind of sight or insight guides us past outward appearances that we may base judgments on and to look deeper to discover the truth about a person's character. Years ago in my first parish I knew an elderly blind lady who had an uncanny ability to look into someone else's heart. She would have the person sit in front of her, hold onto the person's hands, and listen intently to what the person was saying. Her "gaze" could pick up the truth in the person's words. Our emotional insight leads to compassion, empathy, and understanding and away from mistaken first impressions and quick judgments.

There is our spiritual sight to recognize the presence of the living Christ, to perceive how God wants us to live and act as this church, and to discern the purpose God has for us. Bartimaeus already relied on spiritual sight because when he cried out for Jesus twice he identified him as the Son of David. He believed Jesus was the Messiah. He would have joyfully sung the hymn, "Be Thou My Vision, O Lord of My Heart," that we have in our worship service on occasion. After his healing, he followed Jesus in his faith journey, and would look for the signs of the Kingdom – love, joy, justice, and peace – and create more space for them to thrive in human life. Developing spiritual sight through prayer, study, and worship, embracing the presence of Christ in our daily living, and wanting God's purpose to unfold in our lives and in the lives of others are crucial parts of our faith.

And there is the ability to see into the future that God has in store for us. Foresight is anticipating how every decision we make and action we undertake today will affect our lives and the lives of others tomorrow. Bartimaeus anticipated that his decision to ask for Jesus' help would completely change his life from that moment on. We need to anticipate that every act of kindness as well as every deed of hurt we commit will have repercussions in the future. God is drawing us into the future God wants us to have for our own well-being, for the welfare of our children and children's children, and for peace on earth. The light of God in Christ beckons to us through a darkening time and a shadowy world to a much brighter future the Holy Spirit is guiding us to take.

The ability to see involves our physical sense, our emotional insight, our spiritual understanding, and our foresight into the future. The gospel story of Jesus healing Bartimaeus involves sight on these different levels. They are good lessons to learn about how we can lead our lives as God's children, as members of the human race, as followers of Jesus Christ, and as Christians who are open to the Holy Spirit leading us into tomorrow. Amen.

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Twenty-First Sunday After Pentecost  
October 29, 2006