

Seeing As We Ought

Mark 10:46-52

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

October 25, 2015 – Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost

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In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. As I was reading through this morning's text it struck me how many traits we all share with one another – not to mention how many traits we share with those we read about in Holy Scripture. Although on the surface we are all so very different, when you take the time to dig deeper, what you find is that in many respects we're also very much alike. One of the most common characteristics we share appeared quite clearly to me here in the words of this Gospel – and that is that every one of the characters unveiled here in this text – excepting, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ – was blind in one way or another – and that blindness was what caused each of them to act the way they did. And so, when you think about it, most of them were very like you and me.

First we have the disciples and a great multitude, with Jesus leading, walking together along the road that led out of Jericho. We know the Apostles were there, too, for they certainly would have been among the company of the disciples – and they had just conversing with our Lord throughout the preceding verses of this Gospel. Now we know very little about the multitude other than that they had probably heard Jesus preach and teach – and had undoubtedly been impressed with His words. Even though they had not yet fully understood the role He had come to fulfill as the Savior of sinners and the only Hope for fallen mankind – they still probably considered Him to have a great deal of wisdom and knowledge. The final person mentioned in this drama was a man by the name of Bartimaeus, which in Hebrew very simply means “son of Timaues.” Again, all we know about Bartimaeus is that he frequently sat begging by the side of the road leading out of Jericho – which was probably where he lived. Aside from this we are told of no others who were present – even though there were apparently many more there that day alongside the road, since Bartimaeus had been able to tell by the commotion surrounding around him that Jesus and His entourage were approaching on their way out of the city.

So, one verse – one short, simple verse – is all that was dedicated to the introduction of the people who would witness this remarkable scene – this incredible event that's since been indelibly etched on the hearts and minds of millions of Christians for countless centuries. And yet, do you really need to know any more about these people than what's recorded here? Well, the only other things you need to know are revealed as this scene unfolds. The

first person to act is Bartimaeus. He heard from others that Jesus of Nazareth was coming down the road. And upon hearing this he began to shout: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” – convinced that Jesus could do something to help his wretched condition. And it was this very same conviction that caused him to continue calling out to Jesus all the more loudly – even after he had been repeatedly told to quiet down.

Some have attributed Bartimaeus' behavior on the severity of his condition. Someone could undoubtedly make a case for dementia – and maybe that's what some of those who were with Jesus thought. You've all run across people like Bartimaeus sitting on street corners or along the roadside throughout Kansas City. If you happen to run into one of these unfortunate persons, your first inclination might be that you hope they don't catch your gaze so you can pretend you haven't seen them. After all, it's much easier to deal with something unpleasant if you refuse to acknowledge it. But, if one of these folks happen to catch your eye, then what? You might actually have to talk to them – and then, what would you say? If they should call out to you, how will you be able to ignore them? If they wave their tin cup in your face, how will you be able to overlook their plea for help? Let's face it, encounters with “these kinds” of people would be so much easier if they would just go hide themselves in a corner where you didn't have to look at them – or if they're going to be out on the street the least they could do is keep to themselves so they don't bother the rest of us – who, I'm quite sure, don't want to be bothered by them.

There's an uncomfortableness factor involved in such encounters with the poor and downtrodden of this world. But, what do you suppose is really behind this feeling of uneasiness we tend to experience in such situations? Might I suggest that maybe you're feeling a little bit high and mighty? Perhaps you have an overinflated opinion of yourself which has convince you that because you've made better decisions, associated with a “higher class” of people, or have a better education, that “these people” really they deserve their station in life. Or, maybe you're just blind to their needs – physical and spiritual – and would prefer to stay that way.

That's what I see in the minds of those who were busy-ing themselves by telling Bartimaeus to keep his voice down and not bother the Master. After all, what could this poor beggar possibly know about seeking an audience with someone as important as Jesus? To be sure, these

others had been with Jesus a much longer time. They'd heard Him speak of many great things. They'd seen with their own eyes the miracles He had done. How could this blind beggar do anything other than get in the way of what they and Jesus were trying to accomplish? They were sincerely convinced that they knew best, and so – because they had blinded themselves to the truth – they felt confident in instructing Bartimaeus. Of course – as evidenced from what happened shortly afterward – they were wrong. But, since both they and Bartimaeus were convinced that the other party was the one who was in error, who was to judge which was right and which was wrong? The cause for the distinction was in who each of them thought Jesus was. The difference between them could only be determined by finding out which of them was really blind.

Our Lord was about to provide an answer. Calling Bartimaeus to His side, Jesus asked him: "What do you want Me to do for you?" Bartimaeus responded: "Rabboni, that I might receive my sight!" Then, instead of touching him, praying over him, or even directly addressing his problem, Jesus replied: "Go your way, your faith has made you well!" "Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus." The text doesn't record the reaction of those who witnessed this, but you can bet they were impressed. What I'd like to know is when Bartimaeus' eyes were opened and his blindness cured, did they then remain in their blindness? Did they continue seeing things the way they had always seen them, or was there a change in them as well?

Scripture doesn't tell us, but then, the point isn't whether or not the people who were there that day were healed of their blindness. The point is that you and I need to know whether or not we've been healed of our blindness. You see, while Bartimaeus is the one who appears to be blind in this text, the real blind men were all the others. Listen to the words Bartimaeus used when calling out to Jesus. He said: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Maybe those words doesn't mean all that much to you, but they meant everything to those Jews who believed and trusted the Old Testament promise that God would one day send His Son into the world as Savior. They knew this Savior would come from the line of David – "great David's greater Son," they called Him – and they knew that when He came He would bring healing such as the world had never before known. Not only would many be healed of their infirmities and illnesses, but even more importantly, they would be released from their sins and granted eternal life with God in His heaven.

And that's the way it is today, dear Christian. You and I were once blinded by sin and unable to see or approach

God, but when the Holy Spirit came into our lives and breathed His life-giving breath on us at Baptism, all of that changed. The scales fell off our eyes as we were brought into God's gracious presence in Christ and given everything God has to give us as part of His new creation – conformed to live in the image of Him who redeemed us. Yet even though God has made you able to see Him through the eyes of faith, in this world and life there's a blindness that still remains even in the children of God – a blindness fostered by our Old Evil Foe, the Devil himself – who will continue to haunt and taunt you until that blessed day when you pass out of world and enter eternally into the next.

That blindness manifests itself most often in your inability to see God even now as He busily engages Himself in your life. Bartimaeus, after having his physical sight restored – for apparently his spiritual sight was already 20/20 – went and became a follower Jesus. He stayed with Him, became a disciple, and did those things God has called each of us to do as children of God. And so, if you take anything from this text, it ought to be that you begin to recognize that God has not hidden Himself from you, but has, rather, like He did for Bartimaeus, enabled you to see Him and rejoice in His presence – even though He's no longer physically present in a way that can be seen with human eyes. Our Lord Jesus Christ hasn't simply ascended into heaven where He's seated Himself at the right hand of the Father never to be seen again until we finally enter into His presence on the Last Day. He's still among us even now to bless us with His gifts.

Dear Christian, our good and gracious God has healed you of your blindness. Now what He wants is that you open your eyes wide and take in all the blessings He's set before you. He wants you to see Him anew this morning – and every Lord's Day – to recognize Him as He comes into our presence here in the Divine Service, bringing us with Him into His kingdom and making us His own in the waters of Holy Baptism – and feeding us with His very own body and blood in the blessed Mystery of His Supper. Like Bartimaeus, God wants you to get up from your seat this morning, see Him once again with new eyes, serve Him with gladness and a willing heart, be a light to the world reflecting His glory for all to see, rejoicing with great joy in the knowledge that He has called you to belong to Him in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.