

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 22nd Sunday After Pentecost, October 25, 2015

Seeing: The Last Miracle

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October 25, 2015

Mark 10:46-52

Mark's Gospel was the first of the four gospels to be written down and actually is the basis for both Matthew's and Luke's gospels but Mark's manner of writing is different from the others.

It in great measure concentrates on telling of the miracles performed by Jesus --- driving out demons, healing lepers, healing a paralytic, raising the dead, curing blindness, feeding the thousands, and more.

The final miracle happened when Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem with his disciples to face what he knows will be his crucifixion. Three times he has told the disciples what is going to happen but they refuse to accept it --- they have a big blind spot which they can't overcome, as is the case with all of us. It is convenient to have blind spots to block out what we don't want to see. We can avoid a lot of unpleasantness that way.

Our scripture reading this morning is the story of healing a blind beggar, Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus was a nobody, a nothing in the eyes of the people of Jericho. He was ignored by everyone. He was the kind of person people could walk right past and not see. People were as blind to him as he was to the world.

In those days people were often given names which told who they were, and the names would occasionally be changed to reflect changes in their situation. I suspect that such was the case with Bartimaeus, I really doubt that Bartimaeus was the name his parents gave him --- it more likely is a name he was called when he became blind and had to resort to begging to survive.

Bartimaeus quite literally means "son of poverty" or "son of the unclean." Another translation is "son of filth." Can you relate to that? Son of filth? That certainly is not a name given him at birth. It is more likely that as a blind beggar he was dirty, he wasn't clean, and the name was given to him by those who saw him.

So here we have this despised man sitting by the roadside --- a man ignored by

the crowd --- a man who was virtually unseen in the blind spot of those around him.

But Bartimaeus was a stubborn man. He shouted out, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*" when he heard people say that Jesus was coming by. The people told him to be quiet. They tried to shut him up but he persisted. "*Son of David, have mercy on me!*"

Jesus heard him and called to him. Bartimaeus threw off his dirty cloak, possibly the only possession he had. He sprang up and went to Jesus.

Jesus asked, "*What do you want me to do for you?*" and the blind man said, "*My teacher, let me see again.*"

"Let me see again" tells us a lot. Bartimaeus was not born blind. Somehow he had lost his sight --- perhaps due to an accident --- perhaps due to a disease such as macular degeneration --- perhaps due to cataracts --- or to something else.

In any event Bartimaeus knew what sight was. He was familiar with it and he desperately wanted to see again.

Can you imagine knowing the beauty of a flower, a bluebird, these mountains which surround us, the faces of our loved ones and then losing the ability to see? It is hard to imagine something more depressing. Bartimaeus knew what sight was and he was desperate to get it back just as you or I would be.

We have sight, but we don't see everything around us, not at all. In life we have many blind spots. We block out things that we don't want to see, things that are unpleasant to think about or things that we have forgotten.

As Christians we have, at least in theory, committed ourselves to follow Jesus, but do we always do that? Following Jesus is hard to do because at times he leads us to places we don't want to see, places we don't want to visit.

The Rev. Edyth Pruitt at Fairview Presbyterian Church in Lenoir, in a sermon that she gave several years ago on today's scripture passage, contrasted a parent walking in the woods with a child. The adult focuses on following the path. The child's eyes wander and see much that the parent misses --- a flower blossom, an insect, a bright stone, a chipmunk, and so on. The parent is oblivious to these things and walks right by them. The parent is full of blind spots, but the child is not.

Similarly, we don't see things in ourselves. We don't see things that we do, or don't do, that are not right. We have blind spots and at times we love to be blind.

When I was writing this message, I took time out to read an article by Ed Cyzewski entitled “The Supreme Court Just Gave American Evangelicals a Gift.”¹ It was written a few days after the Court’s ruling on same sex marriage.

The premise of the article was, no matter what your personal opinion is of the Supreme Court ruling, so much energy, time and money was spent on fighting against same sex marriage that Christians fighting it had tended to become blind to much greater concerns of far more importance to the faith. Those greater concerns were and are ones that Jesus pointed to --- *“The most basic aspects of human dignity: food, shelter, clothing, justice and sickness ---*

*“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you invited me in,
I needed clothes and you clothed me,
I was sick and you looked after me,
I was in prison and you came to visit me.”*

Mr. Cyzewski said, *“We can disagree all day on same sex marriage [and] most likely will continue to disagree about this issue for 20 years ... However there’s no denying that millions of people around the world are suffering significantly, and Jesus wants us to focus our energies on serving them. If there ever was a group of people who should [care] about children dying of hunger, deeply wounded people suffering in prison, and thousands upon thousands of refugees fleeing unprecedented violence in the Middle East it should be [Christians]....”*

He goes on to say that we aren’t called to fight against someone. Doing so puts us into a big blind spot, one in which we overlook Jesus’ true call to us, which is to fight for those who are suffering in the most basic ways. We need to focus on the hard things in life, not the flowers, the bluebirds and the mountains --- but on poverty, illness, oppression, hunger, and more.

As Rev. Pruitt said, blind spots tell us that we don’t need to change. Faith tells us something different --- even if it leads to Jerusalem.

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us. Let us see.

Amen.

1. Ed Cyzewski, "The Supreme Court Just Gave American Evangelicals a Gift", <http://edcyzewski.com/2015/06/26/the-supreme-court-just-gave-american-evangelicals-a-gift/>

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011 this day and always.