



Looking for God

Mark 10:46-52

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As Jesus and the disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus, who was the son of Timaeus and who was blind, was sitting by the roadside begging.

Hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, Bartimaeus began to shout and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.”

And they called him saying, “Take heart; get up, Jesus is calling you.”

So throwing off his cloak, Bartimaeus sprang up and came to Jesus.

Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

The blind man replied, “My teacher, let me see again.”

Jesus said, “Go; your faith has made you well.”

Immediately Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way.

Mark 10:46-52

At least a third of us are wearing glasses. I think we look stylish, but there are people here wearing contacts because they do not want to look like us. We have paid for our optometrists’ summer homes, because we want to see as clearly as possible.

So this will not be anyone’s first vision test. This one is free—just a few questions: How well do you see the people who love you? Do you see what they most need from you? How clearly do you see the people with whom you work? Do you see it when they are hurting? How honestly do you see those in poverty? How often do you see the sorrows that surround you? How clearly do you see the beauty of the

world? How well do you see the possibilities? Do you see the promise within you? Do you notice the gifts of God? Do you recognize grace? Do you really want to see?

A person who is blind is tapping his white cane along a busy sidewalk. He stops near a group of people and asks for directions to the museum.

A woman says, "Take a left at the next corner."

A man says, "No, go two blocks and then take a left."

A third person says, "You're both wrong. You need to take a right a block up."

At that moment a museum guard appears, "I'm sorry, but you people have to move along. You're blocking the entrance to the museum."

We think we see, but we do not see that well. The people seated around you - you see them, but if you really look at them you might see something new. You might see that they are better looking than you thought or older than you thought. You might see that they are more holy than you have realized.

Blindness is widespread in ancient Palestine. Eye infections are common and no one has any idea how to treat them. People like Bartimaeus go from physician to physician—from crackpot to charlatan. It always ends the same. He is left poorer and with his dream of seeing crushed again. Most people in his situation stop hoping for miracles, but Bartimaeus keeps listening for whispers and rumors of hope.

The streets of Jericho are filled for the Passover. The crowd lines the road where Bartimaeus begs. There are more people than usual. The curious have come to see Jesus.

Bartimaeus asks what is happening. They tell him, "Jesus is coming."

Suddenly everything is at stake. The time has come. The air crackles with possibilities. It is now or never.

Bartimaeus takes a deep breath, and begins to shout. He not only shouts Jesus' name but also that Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah. This story drips with irony. This one who cannot see his hand in front of his face sees more clearly than anyone who Jesus is.

This person who is blind, who in his sightless world has longed to see God so much it aches, recognizes the presence of holiness. The others along the road are curious about God in a mild sort of way, but it is not a passion. God has come, but only for those with eyes to see.

The crowd around Bartimaeus tries to ignore him, but he keeps shouting: "Jesus, son of David have mercy on me! Jesus, have mercy!"

They try to quiet him down. There are two different Greek words for shout. First Bartimaeus calls, then he screams. They cannot hear what Jesus is saying because of the racket he is making.

Somebody gets fed up, "Shut up!" But Bartimaeus yells like a twelve-year-old at a One Direction concert.

Jesus stops: "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Make me see again."

Mark does not give us a healing act or a healing word. Jesus seems to report what has already happened: "Your faith has made you well. You had it in you all of the time."

Bartimaeus sees clearly enough to follow. He has enough vision to give thanks. But Jesus' words—"Your faith has made you well"—are confusing. What happened here?

Doctors acknowledge the importance of a patient's attitude in the success of treatment. Patients who want to be healed often do better. Faith and wellness are not unrelated.

But we have seen too many good people remain sick to believe that faith is a magic cure. No matter how much hurting people wish it was. The early church told this story not to say that every blind person can be healed, but that God helps us all see more clearly.

Mark makes the same point about blindness that Jesus makes so many times, “I’ve come to restore sight to the blind. I’m here to help you see.”

Jesus calls the religious leaders blind guides, “You see, but you never really see.”

Jesus accuses his disciples of having “eyes but not seeing.”

Jesus invites everyone to “Come and see.”

Because the blindness with which we live should break our hearts. It is a disaster to pass through life and not see its glories or its troubles. We have tunnel vision. Instead of paying attention to what is around us we think about what we have to do next, worry about the future, and play recordings from yesterday or years ago. We are surrounded by so much and see so little.

Oliver Sacks tells the story of an artist who lost his color vision as the result of a car accident. The artist could no longer paint the world in bright colors, so he flattened his art to shades of gray. He could hardly stand the way people looked “like animated gray statues.” He could not bear to see himself in the mirror. He could not go to art museums. The sight of a rainbow depressed him.

He became increasingly uncomfortable in the light of day and started going out at night. He wore dark sunglasses so that everything would be consistent. It was not long before he was completely accustomed to a dim, gray life. He suffered a second tragedy when he forgot that there was any other way to see the world.

We stop seeing lights and color. We see things duller than they are. We get used to seeing joy and heartache as shades of gray. We are vision-impaired. Sight does not become insight.

God wants us to see with depth and understanding, but seeing is hard. We keep our eyes shut, because there is so much that we do not want to see. Jesus asks Bartimaeus if he really wants to see. This story is at the beginning of the end for Jesus.

Why would we want to see if the next thing down the road is a cross? Why do we want to see if the world is filled with places where we are needed? If we see the needs of others, then we see what we need to share. So we choose not to see.

But, of course, there is a catch. If we are satisfied with not seeing much we will not only miss suffering, but we will also miss love. If we refuse to see injustice, then we will not see justice being served. If we do not see sorrow then we do not see hope—and there is so much hope to see.

This is Anna Quindlen: “It’s so easy to waste our lives: our days, our hours, and our minutes. It’s so easy to take for granted the color of the azaleas, the sheen of the limestone on Fifth Avenue, the color of our kids’ eyes, the way the melody in a symphony rises and falls and disappears and rises again. It is so easy to exist instead of live.

“I learned to live many years ago. Something really, really bad happened to me, something that changed my life in ways that, if I had my druthers, it would never have been changed at all. And what I learned from it is what, today, seems to be the hardest lesson of all.

“I learned that it’s not a dress rehearsal, and that today is the only guarantee you get. I learned to look at all the good in the world and to try to give some of it back because I

believed in it completely and utterly. And I tried to do that, in part, by telling others what I had learned. By telling them this: ‘Consider the lilies of the field. Look at the fuzz on a baby’s ear. Read on the stoop with the sun on your face. Learn to be happy. Think of life as a terminal illness because if you do you’ll live it with joy and passion as it ought to be lived.’”

You and I are in worship today to remember that there is so much to see if we see with hope and love. Faith is not a way of gaining experiences denied to others. Faith is a way of seeing. We can see the common experiences of birth and death, family and careers, tears and laughter more clearly.

When we have the chance to see, even if there is a cost, we should throw ourselves into it. The crowd may try to coax us back and tell us to close our eyes again. The fainthearted may protest that it is not worth it, but we should keep our eyes open.

See the world more completely than we have seen it before. See our lives for the mystery that it is. See our way to the holiness of it all.

Anna Quindlen again, this time with a story: “I found one of my best teachers on the boardwalk at Coney Island more than fifteen years ago. It was December, and I was doing a story about how the homeless survive in the winter months. He and I sat on the edge of the wooden supports, dangling our feet over the side, and he told me about his schedule, panhandling the boulevard when the summer crowds were gone, sleeping in a church when the temperature went below freezing, hiding from the police amidst the Tilt-a-Whirl and the Cyclone.

“But he told me that most of the time he stayed on the boardwalk, facing the water, just the way we were sitting now, even when it got cold and he had to wear his

newspapers after he read them. And I asked him, ‘Why?’ Why didn’t he go to one of the shelters? Why didn’t he check himself into the hospital for detox?

“He was quiet as he stared out at the ocean and said, ‘Look at the view, young lady. Look at the view.’

“And every day, in some little way, I try to do what he said. I try to look at the view. Look at the view. You’ll never be disappointed.”

What would it take to make us see life while we are living it? What would it take to make us stop missing what we experience? What would it take to make us really see?

What would happen if we kept our eyes open? Would we be astonished at what is around us? Would we discover hurting people who need our help? Would we see ways to make a difference? What would happen if we opened our eyes?

Would we see that God is present, everywhere, all the time. Would we see that there is no place, no moment, no event, no person, where we cannot see God.

Sermon © Rev. Brett Younger

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