

In the Name of the Living God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

A blind man, forced to beg because of his disability, hears that Jesus is coming. He shouts out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus hears him, calls him, heals him. "Immediately, the man regains his sight and follows Jesus."

A story of restored sight. Of one who advocates for himself, even in the presence of others who try to shut him down. Of one who finds community in the companionship of Jesus' followers. "Let me see again!" the blind man says. And he does.

So, the opening question for today is this: Is being able to "see" all of that? We might wonder based on the gospel readings to this point, in terms of what has been happening with the disciples. After half-healing another blind man a couple of chapters before (it takes two attempts to restore that person's sight) Jesus works just as hard to open the eyes of the disciples.

In Caesarea Philippi, he tells them that "the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the religious authorities, and be killed, and after 3 days rise again." And, right away, on hearing this, Peter rebukes Jesus. Tells him off. Gets in his grill, using the language of today. Bottom line? Peter cannot see.

Then, passing on through Galilee, Jesus tells the disciples again that the Son of Man will be betrayed, killed, and will rise from the dead. "But," Mark tells us, "they did not understand and were afraid to ask him." They could not see.

And, yet again, as they are going up to Jerusalem...where he will be betrayed and killed...Jesus tries one last time to show the disciples what is about to transpire: The Son of Man will be handed over. Be killed, and later rise from the dead. Their response? The brothers James and John ask him for the right and left hand seats when Jesus comes into his glory. You can almost hear Jesus sigh. James and John still do not see.

It may be Monday morning quarterbacking, but it can be easy to criticize the disciples for their inability to see the things Jesus is showing them. But the things he is showing them are not easy. Suffering. Betrayal. Death? What might any of us do if our beloved teacher told us these things? Sometimes seeing is not all it is cracked up to be, especially true in the life of faith. It is much easier to focus only on the happy parts of faith, like God's love for everyone, God's desire for our well-being, the hope we find in God. But a mature faith also engages the hard things...things like suffering, betrayal, death, poverty.

Really seeing takes a toll. When we see the world's brokenness, we lose some of our

innocence. We suffer. We feel compelled to change our lives. Author Nora Gallagher puts it this way: "I remember thinking as I worked in the soup kitchen that I did not want to know what I was learning. Because then my life couldn't go on in the same way as it had before: driving around in my nice red Volvo, thinking about what new linens to buy. What we learn we cannot unlearn," she says. "What we see, we cannot unsee." (*The Sacred Meal*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 22.)

Back to the disciples: maybe their not seeing was protective, a defense. Maybe deep down they knew that once they really saw what Jesus was showing them, they would not be able to **unsee** it again. If they really hooked onto what he was saying about the reality of the world, their lives were going to **have** to change. Maybe the disciples avoided seeing what Jesus was showing them because deep down they knew: seeing can be dangerous.

Consider the story of photojournalist Kevin Carter. In 1993, while covering the famine in the Sudan, Carter took a picture of a small girl who had collapsed while walking to a food station. Just a few feet behind the starving girl, a vulture stalked her. In May of 1994, Carter won a Pulitzer Prize for that photograph, but two months later, he committed suicide. A close friend of Carter's said that after shooting the photo of the starving girl, Kevin "sat under a tree and cried and chain-smoked" and could not distance himself from the horror of what he saw. He could not **unsee** what he had seen.

Maybe we already know all of this. That while we may want to take those steps toward true discipleship, fear takes over...and perhaps, like the disciples, we might want to avoid seeing what Jesus wants to show them. So, perhaps, the next question in this message is, "How do we survive seeing?" Well, how did Bartimaeus survive it?

Yelling, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Bartimaeus first acknowledges Jesus, and then he is healed. Scripture and theology are not so hard...it is honest, clean, dependable faith that is hard. First Bartimaeus trusts in Jesus; then he sees. Before Bartimaeus looks at anything, Jesus becomes the context for everything he will see. After his healing, Bartimaeus will not see anything without thinking of the one who healed him. Before the first ray of light hits the first molecule of either retina, Jesus becomes the context in which Bartimaeus will see everything.

What often comes missing from our study and review of scripture, I think, is the intensely intimate connection. For Episcopalians especially, like almost everything else, we tend to try to connect with it all "up here", and struggle with the processing "in here". We might wonder where or how is that intimate connection shown here. It is in the language that we do not know.

We generally assume that the name, "Bartimaeus" is this blind man's given name...his first name. Actually, it is the man's last name....Bartimaeus is an Aramaic phrase: *bar timaeus*, where "bar" means "son". St. Mark is telling us that Bartimaeus is Aramaic for "Son of Timaeus".

This is not intended as a joke, and it is not just a strange episode in the text..because the use of Aramaic phrases that are then explained or translated is a relatively common feature of the Gospel of

Mark. For example: When Jesus raises up a little girl from the dead, he says to her, “talitha cum”, which is Aramaic for “little girl, get up” (Mark 5:41). When he heals a deaf and mute man, he says “ephpahtha”, which is Aramaic for “open up” (Mark 7:34). And when Jesus calls out to God from the agony of the cross he says, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachtani?”, which is the Aramaic of Psalm 22:1: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

So, what does all this mean, and why should we care? Well, in the case of Son of Timaeus, probably not too much because the name itself is not terribly revealing or important. But in the larger view, even in a language that we today do not understand at all, the explanation of things always serves a particular purpose in the Gospel. And that would be this:

The Son of Timaeus was healed by a word. The words that Jesus speaks when he heals, and when he cries out to God, need to be made clear to us. His words that give life, and hearing, and sight, serve in this gospel to emphasize, in a way, the “otherness” of Jesus...his identity as God’s Messiah (the “Son of David” to whom Bartimaeus cries out), and his power to transform the lives of broken or faithless people. The power of his words to heal is the same power of the word of God to create.

“Your faith has made you well”, and it was so. Faith can make us well...and wellness is an all inclusive state. This is not magic, or superstition, or some simple fix. In saying that, he is not saying that these people somehow believed their way into wellness. Rather, he is pronouncing their wellness. Declaring it. Making it happen for them. It is God who heals, and it is faith that receives that healing...so it is, or can be for those who really hear this story and its good news. Faith can make us well. Can open our ears, unstop our ears. Even raise us from the death of blind existence.

This is the power of the promise where faith and forgiveness meet. Where faith and wellness meet. The power of his word for salvation.

And it is to this meeting of faith and fullness of life that we each should be preaching, within the presence of life that God grants us to live every day, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.