

Eyes Wide Open

Proper 25, Year B – Mark 10:46-52

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, October 28, 2012

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Let's get it straight, Bartemaueus wasn't near-sighted or far-sighted. He did not share my presbyopia. He had no astigmatism. Bartemaueus was blind. In a culture where livings were eked out on the edge of survival even in the best of conditions, Bartemaueus was saddled with a physical handicap that put his very survival in jeopardy. We don't know many specifics about Bartemaueus' life but we know how he survived: Bartemaueus begged. Day in and day out, every day since he became blind, perhaps since he was a child, Bartemaueus sat by the side of the Jericho road. I picture this particular day from the Gospel story as hot and dusty and close. But it didn't much matter to Bartemaueus. Because *every* day Bartemaueus sat by that road and ate the dust or the mud flung up from the sandaled feet of people that were too busy to see him there. With his hand held out as busy, sighted people made their way in and out of the bustling city of Jericho, Bartemaueus cried out for alms, for whatever little bit they would give. Bartemaueus was blind, and he begged. It was just the way his world was.

Maybe we want to talk about some special time, some Eden when the human condition was brighter, but it is certainly clear *now* that the world has lost its sight. The world is not near-sighted or far-sighted, it has no astigmatism. The world is *blind*.

Half way across the globe a dictator holds nations hostage with threats of nuclear arms while his own people starve to death. In another place, zealots shoot fourteen-year-old girls who insist on going to school – to make some point, they say, about *their* oppression. In another place, hundreds and thousands of children live their lives without the parents who have all fallen to a deadly disease, orphaned for lack of a few dollars of medicine that has made the same disease no more than a social stigma in our own world. Perhaps not far from here, in this great land of plenty, a mother and her children huddle in a run-down car, or in a building abandoned to decay. Unable to find a place to live, they cringe into the shade to get some relief from the summer sun or crouch into the corners for shelter from the winter's wind and rain. And to keep from starving, they move from place to place asking for what they can ask, and eating the dust and the mud flung up by the shiny shoes of busy people making their way through their lives, busy, sighted people, that are just as blind as Bartemaueus *ever* was. The world is blind, and it begs. It's just the way the world is.

Bartemaueus knew full well that he was blind. It was the way his world was. But he *didn't* want it to stay that way. He had heard that there was a teacher on the move. A teacher that had healed others, brought them back to wholeness of life. And when he heard that the teacher was coming down this road, *his* road, he let it be known in no uncertain terms that he was not satisfied with his lot in life, not satisfied with his blindness. He couldn't leave his spot at the side of the road – he might be trampled under busy feet. Having no one to help and no idea at all where the teacher was, he did the only thing he could: he shouted. Into the dusty air he called, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Today's world knows full well that it is blind, that the way it is going is not the *right* way. Somewhere in the collective experience of being human, there's a flicker of recognition that the situation could and *should* be different. Most of the world has no idea how to change things, how to regain its sight. But the world desperately searches for even a splinter of light in the thick darkness. With titles such as "Life After Death," and "Heaven is for Real," even the New York Times' non-fiction best seller list shouts out for mercy and for sight. We look in every direction for hope – for truth. The world is blind, but it *wants* to be healed.

There were those along the Jericho road that day that thought that Bartemaueus should remember his place, and should keep his peace. "Be quiet," they said as Bartemaueus cried out for mercy. After all,

blind men should be seen not heard. "Let's have a little decorum among the beggars, here," they say. It just wasn't right for the teacher to be bothered with the shouting of an obnoxiously loud blind beggar.

In our best, most politically correct Christian voices we say, "How awful! How could they have been so uncaring." But too often, we Christians avert our eyes from the dirty woman at the edge of the park, her possessions gathered in a couple of trash bags in her cart. And we wonder whether it isn't someone else's turn to help fill pantry shelves, or to lift a hammer or a crowbar or a paintbrush. And we cluck our tongues at the proliferation of books on the New Age shelves at the local bookstore, at the number of business suits at the AA meetings, at the national decline in church attendance. And so we isolate ourselves from the world outside our stained glass windows. A community of righteous, sighted people who can't be bothered by the shouting cries of the noisy, blind world.

Bartemaues knew full well that he was blind, but he didn't want to stay that way. So he wouldn't be stopped. He continued to cry out, even louder, to be heard over the other voices, "Have mercy on me!" And in that dusty, crowded, noisy street, Jesus stopped. In the confusion, in the middle of the clamoring, murmuring crowd, he turned to the sound of one voice and he said, "Call him." And at the master's command, the same people who had sought to quiet Bartemaues just a few moments before, turned and gathered him up. "Take heart," they told him. "Rise, he is calling you." Jesus turned to one blind beggar on that miserable road leading out of Jericho that day and said to him, "Your faith has made you well." And the Gospel tells us that right *then*, Bartemaues gained his sight and followed the teacher, the healer, the savior.

In the middle of the confusion, and fighting, and vain searching, In the middle of our enveloping blindness... Jesus stops and stands before our world. He stands before the world in his Word. He stands before the world in the Sacraments. He stands before the world in the body of the Church. And he says, "*Call them.*" "*Call the wounded, call the broken, call the sightless masses that are searching for me in all the wrong places.*"

And in that command lays the very essence of the Church's mission: To call the blind to the one who can give them sight. To say to them, "Here is the answer you've been stumbling for in the darkness." "Here is the health that you cannot find on your own." "Here is the answer to your longings for wholeness." When the Church is faithful to his command, when we lead the blind to him, when we say to the lost, struggling world, "Here is Jesus, the one who made the lame to walk, the one who made the mute to sing praises, the one who made the blind to see the glory of God," then Jesus restores sight to a world filled only with darkness, and turns the murky twilight of doubt and despair to the noonday brightness of truth and peace and joy.

And in his grace, our *own* blindness is healed, our *own* sight is made whole, as our Savior turns *our* darkness to *his* glorious light.