

Insight for the Future

“My Teacher, let me see again!” Mark 10:51

This Sunday’s Gospel lesson is about sight and sound, about light and darkness and about persistence and faith. It is held against the backdrop of the coming end of the Christian year and the uncertainty of what lies ahead. Nationally and internationally that includes, among other things, healthcare with or without a public option, a good outcome to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the containment of the rattling sabres of Iran and North Korea. At St. Barnabas’ Parish that will include a successful stewardship campaign, confirmation and the Bishop’s visitation, the interviewing of candidates for our new rector and a flurry of relational activities both internally and outreach-wise as reflected upon in our most recent “Salter.” Congratulations and God speed!

As nature rolls back the chlorophyll green of leaves and grasses revealing their true colors hidden since late Spring, as we observe the flight of geese and wild birds southward and as we feel the chill of Fall and inhale the freshness of the Autumn air, our minds and hearts turn once again to events of the coming seasons: a happy Thanksgiving, expectant Advent and joyous Christmastide in the midst of the increasing days of winter darkness.

In our Gospel lesson, one man sat by the roadside in utter darkness. Bartimaeus, our roadside sitter is designated as son of Timaeus, one who venerates God as a believer. And, he himself is a believer. He sits by the roadside day and night waiting for such a moment as this. He has been ostracized, pushed back and shoved around by the villagers because they believe that some sin has caused his blindness and that he was deserving of being left alone by the roadside.

A crowd is approaching. He listens intently. The crowd identifies the coming commotion as the entourage of the Nazarene. The travelers come nearer. Bartimaeus cries out *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon me!”* Many tell him to be quiet, but he cries out all the more, *“Son of David, have mercy on me!”* The crowd grows irritated, but the Nazarene silences their nervous contempt. Jesus stood still and said, *“Call him here.”* A quiet hush falls over the crowd. A path to the blind man parts the crowd like God parted the waters of the Reed Sea during the time of the Exodus. The blind man throw off his incumbency, springs to his feet and lounges forward toward the Son of God-the light in the midst any darkness.

Jesus said to the blind man, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* Bartimaeus thinks of his mother’s hazel eyes, his father’s graying beard and the beautiful whiteness of a snow capped mountain. He remembers the yellow and green, the purple and orange, the brown and red of an autumn landscape, observed long ago during his youth. And, the answer comes back, *“My teacher. Let me see again.”* A murmur goes through the crowd and dies away as the Nazarene speaks. Jesus said to him, *“Go, your faith has made you well.”* His faithfulness, his persistence, his hopefulness and his audacity in the face of many hopeless years have prepared him for this moment. Immediately he regains his sight, but he does not go away, rather he follows Jesus on the way to Jerusalem.

Just as Jericho was the entrance point for Joshua and the children of Israel during the time of the occupation, the domicile of the man beaten up on the road who was ministered to by the Good Samaritan, now it is the locus of a man who wished to regain his sight. This

man like so many others along the way before him was healed, but unlike them there was one difference. He chose to walk the way of the via delorosa, the way of cross with Jesus.

Others were similarly blessings but chose to walk away. A stranger who came up to Jesus walked away sorrowfully because he could not part with his possessions. The disciples will linger behind according to Luke because of fear. For you see, Jesus was passing through Jericho for the final time and the disciples could sense it in their hearts. It was ironically symbolic that Jesus encountered this blind man and restored his sight at Jericho. He restored the sight of one who walked expectantly into the transforming events of the future. In a sense, Bartimaeus responded for all who would come after him. You and I are called this morning to do no less.

What lay ahead for the once blind man of Jericho, we do not know. What lay ahead for Jesus was the entrance into Bethany and Bethphage, Jerusalem and the defiled temple, the arrest, the trial, conviction, sentence, death and finally the resurrection. All of this, coincidentally, was set against the backdrop of the story of Blind Bartimaeus of Jericho.

What his background was, we do not know. Whether he entered Jerusalem or not we are not told. We may assume, however, that he did go all of the way and lived to witness to the marvelous saving acts of God at Calvary and in the garden of Gethsemane. The story of blind Bartimaeus serves as a beacon light for all faithful followers of Jesus on the way to the salvation of humanity. That is our story this morning as well, as we head into an uncertain, but hopeful future. Hopeful, because the Lord of hope is leading us. There is no other light to follow. All else is gloom, darkness and death. Therefore, you and I too are invited this morning to go along with Jesus into our Jerusalem with its Gethsemane.

And so, as the leaves reveal their true colors, the migrating birds fly southward, the chill of Fall comes increasingly and we inhale the freshness of the crisp Autumn air, may we too receive our sight and walk with our Lord along the via delorosa. May each of us have the persistence of faith to ask for what we want from Jesus with the expectation to believe that it will be granted as we follow him alone the way toward a brighter future.

Blind Bartimaeus

**Blind Bartimaeus at the gate
Of Jericho in darkness waits;
He hears the crowd-he hears a breath
Say, "It is Christ of Nazareth!"
And calls, in tones of agony,
"Jesus, have mercy now on me!"**

**The thronging multitudes increase;
Blind Bartimaeus, hold thy peace"
But still, above the noisy crowd,
The beggar's cry is shrill and loud;
Until they say, He calleth thee!"
"Fear not, arise, He calleth thee!"**

Then said the Christ, as silent stands

**The crowd, "What will thou at my hands?"
And he replied, "O give me light!
Rabbi, restore the blind man's sight!"
And Jesus answered, "Go in peace,
Thy faith from blindness gives release!"**

**Ye that have eyes, yet cannot see,
In darkness and in misery,
Recall those mighty Voices Three,
Jesus, have mercy now on me!
Fear not, arise, and go in peace!
Thy faith from blindness gives release!"**

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, U/S.; 1807-1882

**Lord, give us sight that we may walk with you and feel your presence every step of the way!
Amen.**