

Compassion Cures Blindness

Several years ago there was talk about avoiding some of the Bible sections that speak about the blind.

Some well meaning but probably misguided folk were concerned that these stories caused blind people to feel bad.

But blindness in Scripture really isn't about physical blindness; it's about that universal condition in all of us — our own blindness to the truth of who we are, and to whom we belong, and why we are here, and what we are called to do with the limited time we each of us have.

That's what blind Bartimaeus has to teach us today, this beggar who's so different from the people Jesus bumps into these last few weeks.

Two weeks ago, it was the rich young man who comes running up to Jesus looking for eternal life.

He leaves with his head hanging because what he owns actually owns him; and he can't bear to divorce his stuff.

Last week, James and John approach Jesus, and respond to his question: "What do you want me to do for you?" with requests for power and glory.

And here we are today, with Jesus continuing his journey on the way, moving through Jericho, the last stop before confrontation and condemnation and crucifixion in Jerusalem.

Bartimaeus isn't rich and young but poor and blind; yet he throws away the only thing he owns, the cloak that serves as his blanket at night, his umbrella in the rain, and his mat during the day; tossed away without a thought when he hears the call of the one he knows to be Messiah.

When Jesus asks **him** what it is that **he wants**, it's not to be seen, but to see; not to have followers, but to follow.

And while Jesus can't give places of honor away, he can give sight to this already insightful blind man.

The whole thrust of Mark's gospel, it seems, is to move us from blindness to sight, and from sight to insight.

And Mark assures us that even people like us can make that journey because even people like the disciples, folks as dull and slow as we are, found a way.

And he humbles us too, by introducing us to all the folks who **do** get it, the most unlikely crew of losers and deadbeats and bleeding women who somehow have the insight that allows them to see Jesus for who he really is.

It is children and aliens and free lancing exorcists whom Jesus commends as examples of those whom insight welcomes, even when ordinary sight urges us to reject them.

The insight that Mark tries so desperately to bring us to is that "faith is not so much right belief nor pious resignation to inscrutable providence ... it is the refusal to be silenced, it is the refusal to wait for a better time.

It is the rude insistence that the calamity be attended to — not later — but now." T.W. Jennings, *The Insurrection of the Crucified*, 175, paraphrase.

We go back over and over again to these same stories because we too are blind, we too need the healing touch of Jesus to take us from blindness to sight to insight.

Yours' truly stands at the head of the line of the blind!

Last week I preached on left handed power, only to go home that same day and use right handed power on my child that wasn't necessary or required.

And a few weeks ago, we invited in a pregnant local gal and her boyfriend to stay in the container.

They had been sleeping on a piece of cardboard on the sidewalk by the garden.

I met them, learned their names, but I didn't see who they truly are.

Who they really are didn't hit me until I read the story in the paper that ran a couple weeks ago.

Her name is Marie; she's due at Christmas time, and her fiancé's a handyman.

I think his name is Gus and not Joseph only because God didn't want to make things that obvious!

In our broader community, there is daily discussion about the scandal of so many of our neighbors, so many of our young children, with no place to call home, no roof, no bed, no warmth at night.

Some blame the victim, others express compassion but resist solutions that may put these folks in their neighborhood.

I can't tell you how many church leaders come up and say the churches really need to do something; but when the topic moves to what their church might do, suddenly the topic switches to last night's baseball game....

But it's not only social issues where we so desperately need the healing touch of Jesus in order to move from blindness to sight to insight.

How well do we know our own inner mysteries, not to mention those of spouses, children, friends?

Why do some of our children find themselves in the midst of addiction?

Why are some of our youngsters who have so much so chronically miserable?

And why are others able somehow, to find love and laughter and life right in the midst of terrible tragedy?

There's a story about a young Jewish girl living in Nazi Germany.

Goebbles, the propaganda minister, happened to be at her school when the little girl announced: "My cat had kittens, and they're all Nazis!"

Goebbles thought this would be some great propaganda, so he arranged for the girl to be interviewed on the radio.

When the day came, Goebbles himself asked her, live on the air: "Hey Jew, tell us about your kittens."

She smiled and announced: "My cat had kittens, and they're all..... Social Democrats!"

Goebbles is upset: "That's not what you said a couple of weeks ago!"

The girl replies: "My cat had kittens, and they were all Nazis, but then their eyes were opened....their eyes were opened."

It seems to me, at the end of the day, that what opens our eyes, to our own selves, to those nearest and dearest, even to those on the streets, what opens our eyes more than any other thing is compassion.

If we can see the world and all that's within it, through the eyes of compassion, perhaps then we might come to know who indeed we truly are, why we are here, and what it is we are here to do with the limited time we each of us have.

I'll end with this story.

It's about a young woman named Sharon who, while walking downstairs with her infant, caught and sprained her ankle.

Unfortunately, the sprain developed into necrotizing fasciitis, that new illness where one's flesh is consumed.

Within three days, on her 34th birthday no less, she had her leg amputated.

When a friend stopped by and grimly commented about what a horrific birthday present Sharon received, Sharon softly disagreed:

"I found myself hovering close to death; but now I know I will live.

Before the operation, I was in this strange state of consciousness;I floated for hours on a blue sea, it was the spirit.

But what I most remember is the operating room, when I woke up immediately before amputation, how the doctors were trying to be faithful to the limited bits of knowledge that they had.'

It was as if we were all in this huge library and in our hands were but a few books, and yet -- the womb of the library was compassion.'" C. Keller, *On The Mystery*, 172. paraphrased

We make our way through life with so little knowledge -- mystery surrounds every person, every community.

We are all blind to so much.

Perhaps the thing that saves us is that we live and move and have our being within this beautiful womb, a womb we call God, this womb of compassion.

If we trust it, perhaps then we too shall see.

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