

Twenty-Second Week After Pentecost (RCL/B): "Once Was Blind, But Now Can See"
Jeremiah 31:7-9, Mark 10:46-52
October 23-24, 2021
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

As I read this Gospel earlier in the week, I remembered an Easter Sunday years ago when we had beautiful rings of fresh flowers on the window ledges here in the sanctuary. One of our long-time church friends, Jane, was visiting us with her Seeing Eye companion, not just a pup-in-training, but a full-fledged guide dog, since Jane herself is blind. On the way out she gave me her usual warm greeting, and then with a twinkle in her eye she commented how lovely the roses were in the arrangements. The thought skittered across my mind, "But she can't see, how does she know?" and then I quickly computed that the fragrance of the flowers had tipped her off and allowed her to identify them. I wonder how many of the **sighted** worshipers that day noticed the flowers as appreciatively as Jane did?

Even **before** he regains his sight, Bartimaeus sees more clearly than many people in the crowd who elbow and shove him, and then shout at him to shut up when he calls out at the top of his lungs, to be heard over the din:

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"
(Mark 10:48)

Nobody else in this Gospel so far has used that title for Jesus. Nobody else has drawn a straight line between Jesus of Nazareth and the promised, long-awaited descendant of King David who would reign forever. The blind man sees the truth that others have missed.

This fellow Bartimaeus is unusually energetic, boisterous, uninhibited, determined, and focused. He may not have vision but he's got volume, and he's not afraid to use it! He's not going to be cowed into silence by a mere multitude telling him to be quiet. When he's told that Jesus is calling him, he leaps up. St. Mark gives us the interesting detail that as he

rises, he throws off his cloak, I guess so he doesn't trip on it in his headlong rush to reach Jesus. I like this guy. He reminds me of the lame man in the third chapter of Acts, the one who asks Peter and John for a handout, the fellow to whom Peter famously says, *"Of silver and gold I have none, but what I have I give to you: in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk!"* (Acts 3:6) St. Luke describes what happens next:

*...[Peter] took him by the right hand and raised him up; immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. **Jumping up**, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and **leaping** and praising God.*
(Acts 3:7-8)

When Jesus asks Bartimaeus, *"What do you want me to do for you?"* (Mark 10:51), without hesitation he blurts out clearly and exactly what he wants: *"My teacher, let me see again."* (Mark 10:51) Something Bartimaeus has over on us is that he realizes he's blind. He realizes he has no power to grant himself sight. He is humble to ask our Lord to do for him what he cannot do for himself.

The Lord Jesus would heal our blindness, too, if we would just recognize it and ask Him for the gift of holy insight. As Jesus tells us elsewhere, though, we're quicker to see and criticize the splinter in our neighbor's eye than to acknowledge the plank in our own (Matthew 7:5). We need humility to admit, "I don't even know what it is I'm missing, what I'm incapable of seeing.... Jesus, have mercy on me."

We're in good company in our blindness. Remember how Saul invested all his energies in rounding up Christians and arresting them? Until the Lord literally blinded him on the road to Damascus and asked:

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" [Totally clueless,] [Saul] asked, *"Who are you, Lord?"* ... *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."* (Acts 9:4-5)

The Lord sent a man named Ananias to heal Saul. Ananias was horrified. He asked the Lord, "Are you crazy? He's apt to kill me!" The Lord reassured Ananias that He had chosen this man for special duty, and Ananias did as he was told:

"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from [Saul's] eyes, and his sight was restored.
(Acts 9:17b-18a)

Saul, of course, became Paul, and blessed with holy insight, it is he who opened up the preaching of the Gospel beyond the Jews to the Gentiles.

Our hymn of the day is *Amazing Grace*:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

Those words were penned by John Newton, a former slave trader. By God's grace the scales fell off his eyes as surely as they had fallen off Saul's.

Maybe you've read *Something Beautiful for God*, a short biography of Mother Teresa, written by British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge. Muggeridge traveled to Calcutta to meet and interview Mother Teresa. He arrived an atheist and left a believer. In speaking with her and seeing the ministry to the poorest of the poor offered by her and her Missionary Sisters of Charity, the scales fell from his eyes, too.

I have a daily calendar of inspirational sayings and this is the quote I found there on Friday:

The well of Providence is deep.
It's the buckets we bring to it that are small.
(Mary Webb, 1881-1927, Scottish Religious Leader, Writer, Poet)

God has more to give than we can even ask. There is an ocean of grace available to us and we come to that divine shore with just a bucket – or a ladle – or an eye dropper – or

a thimble. God has given us the Word as a lamp for our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105). God has sent the Son, our Lord Jesus, who tells us, *"I am the light of the world"* (John 8:12), a *"light that shines in the darkness,"* a light no darkness can overcome (John 1:5). But blindness must be lifted before light can be seen. It's both good news and challenge that **God isn't finished with any of us yet**. We do not yet see as clearly as we might.

This weekend we formally welcome new members into our family of faith. We are glad for our family to grow! We are grateful for the Holy Spirit's weaving of new brothers and sisters into the tapestry of our community. It's in this holy community that we receive the means of grace, Word & Sacrament. It's here that we are bathed in and fed by the gift of God's love and forgiveness. It's here that we are challenged to adopt a God's eye view of our world, here that we are called to see through the eyes of Jesus and recognize all people as God's children, here that we echo Bartimaeus' plea and pray together, "Lord, have mercy!" "Lord, let us see again!" It is here that we nurture the faith that makes us well....

Going back to our friend Jane. She has shared with us on more than one occasion how, when she was still young, the Seeing Eye became an answer to her and her parents' prayers for increased independence, dignity and self-confidence. Jane never regained the physical sight she lost in infancy, but she has led a life of great spiritual beauty and incredible insight. She has taught our youth that being blind is a good preventative to prejudice based on someone else's physical appearance.

"Jesus, have mercy! Make us blind, we pray, to distractions and clear-sighted to what matters most to you. Amen"

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

