

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
October 28, 2018  
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Trinity Episcopal Church, Bend

Job 42:1-6, 10-17  
Psalm 34:1-8  
Hebrews 7:23-28  
Mark 10:46-52

Day by day, dear Lord, of thee three things I pray:  
to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly,  
follow thee more nearly, day by day.



I imagine most of us know the hymn, if not the tune. The version most of us know is almost certainly the one popularized in the early 1970s musical *Godspell*. But this tune is older; the composer, Arthur Henry Biggs, died in 1954. And the text is much older still; it comes from a prayer attributed to Richard of Chichester, a 13<sup>th</sup> century English bishop.

To suggest that Jesus might help us see more clearly, to love more dearly, to follow more nearly ... well, that old prayer is a timeless prayer, good for anyone who wants to follow Jesus. At the very least, it's a pretty good takeaway for us this morning.

So let's start there. Let's start with Bartimaeus. And the thing he shows us, before anything else, is that when we pray to see, we're praying for more than just eyesight.

Mark tells us three things about Bartimaeus, right at the start: he's blind; he's a beggar; and he sits by the side of the road. Which is to say, other people pass him by, on their way to or from somewhere else, and Bartimaeus is easily overlooked, pushed to the side of the road, like so much trash. Everybody else is busy, important things to do, important places to be, important people to see – and Bartimaeus, as far as they can see, is not one of those important people.

But Bartimaeus will not be rendered invisible. He wants to be seen, so he calls attention to himself, asking Jesus to show him some mercy. And many in the crowd tell him to cut it out. But Bartimaeus will persist. Before he ever asks to see, Bartimaeus demands to be seen!

And that's the first thing I think we should notice about him ... and it's reason enough, I think, for us to like him ... right from the start. He sees his own worth, even if nobody else around him does. And Jesus sees him, too.

So when we pray to see, may we pray to see what Bartimaeus sees, and what Jesus sees: namely, that none of us deserves to be overlooked or ignored, like so much trash, and no one of us should be seen as a merely an inconvenience to those with more important things to do.

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Jesus tells the crowd to call Bartimaeus to come near. He throws off his cloak. He springs up and comes to Jesus. And then Jesus asks him a question that probably strikes us as a bit odd: "What do you want me to do for you?"

It seems almost too obvious. Jesus would have to be blind not to see what Bartimaeus wants and needs. Just about any of us would presume to know without asking.

But that's not how Jesus sees the blind beggar. Having been treated by so many people like a piece of trash, told to keep quiet, Jesus sees Bartimaeus as a person who deserves to be allowed to speak for himself. Jesus doesn't presume to know what's best for him, so he asks.

And the thing is, the question Jesus asks Bartimaeus is precisely the same question Jesus asked two of his disciples, James and John. That was last week's gospel reading here. They came up to Jesus and asked a favor of him. And Jesus asked them: "What is it you want me to do for you?"

Now before we get to what Bartimaeus says to Jesus, consider their answer. For based on their answer, we can begin to imagine Bartimaeus could have asked for something less than seeing things as they are. He might have been content for Jesus to take care of him.

When James and John were asked, they told Jesus they'd like to sit in positions of honor, one at Jesus' right hand and the other on his left, when he comes into his glory. In other words, "we want to see only what we want to see."

Time and time again, Jesus had been telling the disciples that he's on his way to Jerusalem, and that it will not go well for him there. The powers-that-be will oppose him. They will arrest him. They will nail him to a cross. That's what he wants them to see.

And time and time again, they refuse to see. And they come up with another vision, one that puts Jesus on a throne, able to doll out positions of honor and power and glory for his nearest and dearest. Frankly, it's hard for them to see anything else. We know this ... it's the running gag throughout the gospel stories.

And seeing Jesus and the world as they really are is challenging. Heck, nobody wants to see even one as innocuous and inconvenient as Bartimaeus, a harmless beggar sitting beside the road. And he's the least of what's wrong in this world. The political divides in our nation have become toxic – and that's a fear shared by folks on either side of every political divide – and they are tearing the fabric of our nation apart. And the news this past week has been chilling. Pipe bombs sent to leaders, the first of this violence apparently sparked by political rhetoric. A mass murder in a synagogue, a house of prayer, hatred taught (at least in part) the Christian church itself down through the ages. No wonder we might resist seeing this challenging reality.

As one writer (writing before any of this week's news headlines) notes:

The pain and sorrow of this world so often make us want to avert our eyes from the truth. Turn on the nightly news and see the latest reports of violence in our communities, and we may feel like closing our eyes and relapsing into total blindness. Look with the prophet Isaiah at the massive injustices in our world, the grinding poverty, the degradation of human dignity, the prejudice, and we may feel like tearing our eyes out. <sup>i</sup>

Jesus asked his nearest and dearest: “What is it you want me to do for you?” And James and John, speaking for all of the disciples, say, in essence: “We want NOT to see. We want NOT to see you. We want NOT to see what you see. We want NOT to see what’s wrong in our world – and in ourselves. We want to see only what we want to see. Can you do that for us?”

But Bartimaeus answers the same question: “My teacher, let me see again.” And maybe it’s a thing that seems almost too obvious. And maybe he just wants his eyesight back again.

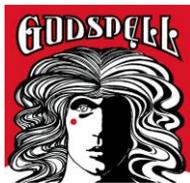
But what he receives is something more than just his eyesight ... he sees Jesus. That’s the very first thing he sees. And in Jesus, he sees one who loves him ... and not only him; Bartimaeus sees Jesus as one who loves all God’s children. He sees the one, therefore, who cannot help but see the pain and sorrow in the world, as well. Bartimaeus sees Jesus. And he sees him clearly.

And in that moment, Bartimaeus immediately sees himself in a new light, as well.

Just a few moments before, he was a blind beggar, consigned to “sitting by the roadside” – *παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν* – actually, it literally means “sitting *next to* the way” (or, if you will, conveniently *out of* “the way”). But as soon as Bartimaeus sees Jesus, even though Jesus tells him, “Go, your faith has made you well,” Bartimaeus doesn’t go away; rather, he “follows [Jesus] *on* the way” – *ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ*. It’s Christian shorthand for becoming a disciple.

And I have to think he sees what it means more clearly than the old-time disciples did before. For the next stop on the way for Jesus – and for Bartimaeus – will be Jerusalem ... and a cross. He sees Jesus more clearly. He loves Jesus more dearly. And he follows Jesus more nearly.

And that’s what makes this a stewardship sermon. When Jesus asks us what we want, what will we say? Will we pray for God to bless us? Or will we, with Bartimaeus, pray to see Jesus ... and in so doing, pray to see ourselves as Jesus sees us, pray to see one another others and the whole of creation as Jesus sees us all?



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<sup>i</sup> Joe Pagano @ <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2018/10/05/let-me-see-pentecost-23-b-october-28-2018/>.