

He is sitting at the side of the road at the entrance to the city. In our own day, he might be sitting at a traffic light or just outside a nice restaurant in the mall or at the grocery store or big box store before being shooed away. But in his time, the blind man is positioned right at the entrance to the city, Jericho. Matthew and Luke just call similar figures waiting for Jesus outside the city gates blind beggars, but Mark, for all of his usual brevity, brings this needy person into sharper focus. He gives him a name *Bartimaeus*. He even tells us what the name itself tells us -- that this individual is the son of Timaeus. Bartimaeus of Jericho.

In the Hebrew scripture, blindness is treated in different ways. God has the power to make people blind and also the power to restore them to sight. Elisha prays to God in II Kings and God strikes the entire Syrian army with blindness. Blind animals cannot be offered in ritual sacrifices at the Temple for blindness in Hebrew culture is seen as a kind of curse, a blemish, a profound limitation that isolates the individual and makes people distance themselves from the blind individual. On the other hand, some primitive care is taken for blind persons. No one in the teaching of the Leviticus is allowed to place a stumbling block in the way of a blind person or to mislead a blind person. So when Bartimaeus cries out, he is not misled or led away. Although the people around him tell him to keep quiet, they do not mislead him. They tell him that the commotion that he is witnessing is about Jesus. Perhaps he hears the messianic title, Son of David, for he uses it to cry all the more loudly into the blank space at which he stares by the side of the road -- *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.*

Jesus acknowledges the presence of the blind man. He stops. He asks for him to be called. The people change their behavior. They call to Bartimaeus: *Take heart. Get up. He is calling you.* Then we get this vivid impression of energy and release. *So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.* This is unexpected behavior. no hesitation. No slow and tentative walking. Instead this release of energy. Energy and anticipation as he arrives. *51 Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again."*

Where do we regain our sight? Find our perspective? Is it too much to say that at some point in our own lives we have been sitting at the side of the road? *Let me see again* is a

statement that reaches down past the physical realm of eye sight into the spiritual realm of insight. To see deeply into the nature of things. To perceive, to grasp.

One of our communion hymns speaks of this kind of seeing in terms of encountering Jesus. *Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face;/ Here would I touch and handle things unseen; / Here grasp with firmer hand eternal grace,/ And all my weariness upon Thee lean.*

He comes to Jesus, this blind man, with all his weariness and all his expectation. And this pattern of Bartimaeus is significant. He cries out. He springs up with expectation. In the presence of Jesus, he asks for an essential need in his own personal life. And all of this is described as faith. Faith here is action, anticipation, encounter, and not confined by a system of belief. Faith here is disarmingly simple and potentially on that account scary because it is against all odds.

Standing before Jesus, is it too much to say that this man, Bartimaeus, etched into the pages of holy scripture becomes a living soul? The Anglican poet William Wordsworth speaks of such a thing in Tintern Abbey when he writes of becoming a living soul in this fashion:

Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul:  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things.

I am struck by some of these phrases in Wordsworth's poem and would like to apply them to Bartimaeus in this moment as his faith makes him well. Note the terms *living soul, eye made quiet, the power of harmony, the deep power of joy*. And these things combine to produce the ability to see deeply, to see into the very life of things.

Bartimaeus opens his eyes and sees. But is that all? Surely he also touches and grasps things unseen. And all of this in the context of a liberating moment. A liberating encounter with Jesus. The last lines of our Gospel this morning conclude with *Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way*.

We began our scripture reading this morning with a passage from Jeremiah--a section known as the Book of Consolation. And this section is filled with hope. In the midst of overwhelming discouragement the prophet is given a message of hope:

*See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north  
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,  
among them the blind and the lame, those with child and  
those in labor together;*

*a great company, they shall return here.*

The restoration of sight is an image in the New Testament and in the writings of the prophets throughout holy scripture--an image for a new time, a new age--an age of liberation.

Today we are in a hate-filled time, a time of violence. Recent events, including the sending of bombs through the mail and just yesterday the explosion of hate-filled gun violence in a Jewish temple in Pittsburgh have combined to send us into dark and lonely places in which we, too, sitting by the side of the road of violence and hate, would cry out with Bartimaeus all the more loudly: *Jesus, Son of God have mercy on me.... Have mercy not so much on me alone but on us. Have mercy on us for our refusal as a people to find words instead of bullets. For our refusal to find dialogue instead of diatribe. For our refusal to find pathways of harmony and peace and joy. For our refusal to become in the presence of the Holy One-- living souls.*

The giving of sight and especially insight is a time of hope in the scriptures. And hope can come when we humbly ask the Holy One through the Holy Spirit to come into our lives and with the healing power of Jesus to touch us one more time.

*So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.*

May we do the same.

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit