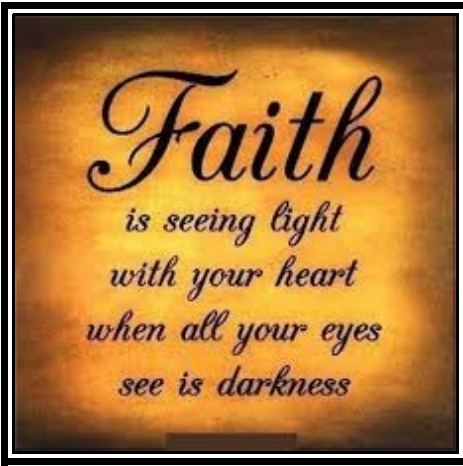


Faith to See



Our text today is: Mark 10:46-52 It is the story of Bartimeus, a blindman from Jericho who was cured by Jesus.

As a child, my mother would often take me and my sister Marie to the city of Trenton, New Jersey to shop. In those days, the stores were still along broad city sidewalks and there was a great deal of business happening out on the sidewalks themselves. People sold hotdogs, hot pretzels, newspapers, and polished shoes. In the summer, you could buy ice-cream and cold drinks. Policemen walked about greeting people. The

sidewalks were an exciting experience in themselves; everyone was on the sidewalks.

There were also beggars on the sidewalks. One man in particular sticks in my mind. This man had no legs; he simply sat upon a piece of wood with a caster on each corner; it was like a "garage creeper". To move about, he pushed himself along with his hands. Even as children, Marie and I had to look down to see him. Every day he would come out to the sidewalks to sell pencils for a living. Seeing that man upset me. He ruined my day; I wanted to forget him, but I couldn't, and I never have. My Mother could not give me a satisfactory explanation of what I saw on the sidewalk that day. 40 years ago after I told that story; Phil Lawrence came up to me after the service to share that his mother, Mae, also took him to Trenton shopping when he was a boy; he had seen the same man and had continued to feel the same way to that very day.

There are some scenes in life upon which our eyes do not easily focus. This, I am sure, is one of them. Yet, it was at that moment that I began to realize that all people do not have the same chance in life. By seeing that man, I began to recognize my own feelings of humanity, weakness, and vulnerability. As a child, I had nothing to share, except a nickel to buy a pencil --the small purchase did little to make me feel more comfortable.

In the Middle-East, there are beggars by the hundreds and thousands; there are poor people by the millions. The poor are consigned to work for nearly nothing their entire lives. Those with a "foot hold" on life are the ones who own donkeys and use them to haul sand in burlap bags to build large hotels, or those who haul stones in push-carts. These "working poor," at least, have some hope; but, you have to look a lot lower to see the blind beggar in these countries that lack opportunity. Thank God for *World Vision* and the *American Leprosy Mission*, and others. Thank God for those who will at least stop and look.

In 1969, I walked through a gate into the old city of Jerusalem, to my right, sitting in the dirt, was a man who could not see or walk. He just sat there crying out with his arm outstretched. As I walked through the city, a young girl with a baby grabbed hold of my arm and I pulled her around the city as she pleaded with me to help her. I had, by then, given away all of my extra money; I was scared. Eventually, I pulled away from her; I felt guilty. I could hardly blame either of these two people for becoming bitter --after all, I didn't even want to look at them.

But, looking at this picture is part of facing reality. The scene of a blind beggar is intended to be a picture of a poor needy sinner before he or she comes to Christ. All people are not as fortunate as we are; few people have the luxuries that we have; all people are not as physically able as we are. Some people are born blind. *In fact, we*

are all born blind in some way or another. The blind beggar scares us because we have so much in common with him. It is this blindness that keeps us from a caring understanding of others. We can never see our advantage and their disadvantage. We can never see our own failures and sin until Jesus comes and says, "Go; your faith has made you well" (Mark 10:52).

Have mercy on the blind beggar; he is every bit as human as you are! We must have some feeling for this poor fellow --not only is he blind, but, to complicate matters, he is poor (he is a beggar). To be blind is one thing; but, to be forced to beg is quite another. The Bible says, "Those who mock the poor insult their maker" (Proverbs 17:5).

This is exactly how Jesus Christ sees lost humanity --as blind (In 1 Thessalonians 5, we are called "children of darkness"), and as poor. Though we may strut, and crow, and cock about; any real advantage we have has very little basis of our own making. "For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift" (1 Corinthians 4:7)? You have some advantage; it may be your good looks, it may be your family, it may be your health, it may be your money, it may be your intelligence. Or it may be that your country is not presently being invaded, nor have you lived in the middle of an earthquake. Each of us need to see this.

In our story, the man's name is Bartimeus. The town in which he lived was Jericho. Jericho is an inviting, little semi-tropical town. It is an oasis in the desert wilderness of Juda. A few years ago, Bishop Pike died in the desert to the west of Jericho. Elisha's fountain is there; it is still a main water-source for the town. Jericho is known as *The City of the Palms*. The Dead Sea is to its East, the Mount of Temptation is to its west. Bartimeus never saw the beauty of Jericho, though he often felt the oppressive heat. I doubt that he ever traveled away from the town, since it was in the middle of a desert, and he had no money, nor could he see. Bartimeus could afford few comforts.

Spiritually, we too, are blind. It is true that we account ourselves able to see; but, this, too, is part of our blindness. It is only when we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit with a love for God and others that we are able to see how blind we are. Yes, we are blind to much of God's good truth.

In addition to being blind we are also poor. Our father Adam spend our birthright; he lost our estate. Paradise, the homestead of our race, has become dilapidated and we have been left in the depths of beggary (spiritually speaking) --left without anything with which to buy bread for our hungry souls, or raiment for our unclothed spirits - -left blind and helpless, until Jesus comes and visits us in love. Love helps us to see. Real sight comes from the heart. A "heartless" church is a blind church. In the church, the blind people are the "heartless" people.

What was the source of this poor man's faith? He had faith; for it was faith which obtained his sight. Where did it come from? Where did he get it? We are not told in this passage how Bartimeus came to believe Jesus to be the Messiah; but, I think we can conjecture. It is quite certain that Bartimeus did not come to believe in Christ from what he saw. The saying was not true for him --"seeing is believing." Jesus had done many miracles; many eyes had seen, and many hearts had believed because they saw. Bartimeus also believed, but certainly not as a result of his eyesight --he was stone blind.

How did he come to believe? Certainly, it could not have been because he had traveled much through the country. Even if he had traveled, there would be little for a blindman to see. So, how did he come to believe.

Bartimeus' faith came by hearing. "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). I expect that he heard the passers-by talking about Jesus of Nazareth, and perhaps, he would ask them to stay and tell him about this man, and some apparently did. I'm sure he heard about Jesus raising the dead --then one day he, no doubt, found out that he had given sight to the blind.

Then, I expect one day he was turning this story over in his mind and a text he had heard in the synagogue occurred to him; he remembered hearing that Messiah would come to "open the eyes of the blind" (Isaiah 35:5). Quick in thought, he at once concluded that this man, who could cause the blind to see, was certainly the Messiah. From that day forward he was a secret disciple of Jesus. He might have heard others scoff him, but he did not scoff. He might have heard some of the passers-by calling him an imposter, but he could not join in. After all, he gave sight to the blind; how could he be a deceiver?

Perhaps his life dream was that someday Jesus would come to his town. The stories he had heard, when compared with the Bible, made him believe that Jesus must be the predicted Messiah.

Then, how is it that you have not believed in Christ? You, also, have heard of the wondrous deeds; you, also, have understood how many have been pardoned and forgiven. You, also, have seen the truth and power of his teaching. There was something deep within Bartimeus that said, "I believe he can do something for me." I hope that "that something" is within someone here today. The source of his faith was hearing.

Faith is quick to grasp opportunity. Jesus had already traveled through Jericho; and as he went into the city, there was a blind man standing by the road --Jesus healed him. Bartimeus, however, seems to have lived on the other side of town. Therefore, he did not get the blessing until Christ was about ready to leave. As he was sitting in his customary manner, he heard a great disturbance and asked what it was all about. Upon asking, he found out that Jesus was about to pass by. He might have said, "He passes by, but he won't help me." He might have said, "He is surrounded by a great many people; he'll not have time for me." He might have said, "He's leaving town now; I suppose it's too late." But he didn't. Instead he said, "Jesus of Nazareth have mercy upon me." So, however slender the opportunity, it encouraged him. I admire him.

And now may we turn to you again. I wonder how many more times Jesus will come by for you? Will he come another time or not? Then why not seize the opportunity? It is always true; there is no time so sure as the present. Jesus said, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." I pray that such words will encourage some Bartimeus sitting here today.

Listen to his cry of faith. "Son of David, have mercy upon me." Now then, those who were already following Jesus were actually a hindrance to his coming to the Lord. They were saying, "Shut-up, don't bother him; can't you see he's busy" (Mark 10:47,48). Sometimes, non-Christians have good reasons for not coming to church. We who follow Christ can be a hindrance; we can be insensitive. We must always ask, "Am I a hindrance in any way?" For example, do I insult the poor? I am with Pope Francis on this; recent attitudes of many Christians are certainly not the "pathway to Christ."

Yet, often God does his work in spite of us, and not because of us. "Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me" (Mark 10:49-51). You can bet that he didn't get that out of a prayer book. Not to be hard on prayer books, but I am certain that God wants to know exactly how we feel, and what we think, and what it is that is hurting us.

When Jesus did call him, he came quickly. In fact, he threw off any garment that might have kept him from getting there faster (Mark 10:50). When we come to Jesus we ought to be ready to throw off anything that might keep us from getting there --whatever it might be. If it's going to keep us from getting to Jesus, then it's not worth keeping. Sometimes it's our greed that keeps us from Christ, sometimes our pride, sometimes our bitterness, sometimes it's our vengeance, sometimes it's our sensuality. Sometimes, it is our fear and paranoia. None of these are worth a "tinkers hoot", as we say.

This man knew what to say, "Lord that I may receive my sight." There was no confusion here. When a thing is important enough, words are no problem. Sight would mean everything to Bartimeus. He would be able to get away from that cursed begging. He would have a new life. He would make a contribution; people would be able to see his worth! He would, for the first time, see the beauty of the earth. The same may be true of you also. Unless you know Christ, life isn't nearly as valuable as it could be, you're not making your greatest contribution to humanity, nor are you seeing the real beauty in the world. Nor, are you being as fair as you might be.

Sight also meant that Bartimeus would see the Lord Jesus and "follow him in the way" (Mark 10:52). First, he came to know the Lord, then he followed him. Jesus said, "My sheep know my voice and they follow me." Who is the happy, thankful man following Jesus? Why, it is Bartimeus the poor, blind beggar!

Do you see those other people? They are his brothers and sisters and prototypes. There is the drunkard who had his sins forgiven, and there is the profane man who had his profanity cleansed out, and there is the harlot who has become one of the daughters of Jerusalem. There is the arrogant man, once blinded by his proud self-righteousness; now, he can see. There is the greedy man, "lending to the poor." There they are, the ones who once led others to hell --now leading them to heaven. Because, now they can see to get there themselves! May God grant that the story of Bartimeus be written over again in our own experience, and may we meet where the eternal light of Christ has chased away all blindness.

I grew up next door to a boy named Donnie Sanders. Though he could see in our boyhood years, Donnie had a condition that caused complete blindness by his mid-twenties; he married a girl named Jean --who was also totally blind. Each year, Gloria and I would visit them at their Saint Petersburg, Florida apartment. Jean had a clever sense of humor. In that, she always reminded me of a girl named Rosalyn Porter, who grew up in our Austinville Church. She majored in English at Messiah College. Both girls were excellent "word crafters" --and both girls were funny. Donnie and Jean lived on about the fifth floor of an apartment building, a lot like the apartments that Vladimir Putin is bombing every week. Their apartment over-looked Tampa Bay. After climbing the five floors, standing in their livingroom, I said, "Wow, you have a fantastic view of the Bay! Jean replied, "I wouldn't know Ken, we're completely blind --remember?" Donnie and Jean spent their entire lives editing braille books for a publishing company. They spend their lives helping other blind people see through their fingers. My deepest hope is that the Christian Church would help people see again --through their hearts. If you can't see with your heart --you are in desperate trouble.

In my own 58 years of Christian ministry there has never been a time when the church needed this story more desperately. Yes, never stop singing it, "Open my eyes that I may see" --see Jesus with my heart. Yes, see Jesus with my heart. See everything with my heart. The truly blind are the "heartless."