**St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church**

**Proper 24B**

**Job 42:1-6, 10-17**

**Psalm 34: 1-8, 19-22**

**Hebrews 7:23-28**

**Mark 10: 46-52**

**The Blind Who Can See**

"**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner**." It’s the Jesus Prayer. A prayer that, if we care to admit it, should be the prayer instantly on our lips each day as we wake up and when we prepare to sleep. It is a prayer of absolute confession and absolute faith.

It is the prayer of Bartimaeus: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” as Jesus prepares to leave Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. The crowds react in predictable ways. Some don’t want to hear his loud cry and admonish him, telling in to be quiet. He persists and calls loudly out again to Jesus, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” The street is filled with people, come to see Jesus, milling around. It’s noisy, filled with voices, the sights and sounds of animals, street vendors and the like. But Bartimaeus sees nothing of this. He is blind to it all, but lifts his voice up high over the confusion and cacophony of that scene. And Jesus hears him and stops, saying to the crowd, “Call him here.” And the crowd, sensing that something amazing was about to happen, shifted from the edge of hostility to participation in communal anticipation of good, urging Bartimaeus to come forward to Jesus: with words of hope-filled encouragement: “Take heart, get up, he is calling you!” We can imagine that some helped Bartimaeus move in the right direction as he sprang up to answer Jesus’ call and as he throws off his cloak in a gesture of wildly excited hope and faith and makes his way toward the voice calling him from out of the crowd.

Bartimaeus had little to his name. Perhaps his cloak was his only real possession. His only worldly comfort, his protection from the cold, his hiding place, the place to which he could escape. And yet, he threw it off as Jesus told the crowd to call Bartimaeus forward. The crowd, too, became part of the miracle, wondering at the possibility of real healing for Bartimaeus. “Take heart….get up….he is calling you.”

We can imagine that the crowd was silenced suddenly, as this new drama surrounding Jesus and a simple blind man took center stage. Jesus is well aware of the man’s blindness, yet addressed Bartimaeus with a question: “What do you want me to do for you?”

What do you want me to do for you? It is a question Jesus would just as likely ask each one of us. Bartimaeus answers, “My teacher, let me see again.” It took less than a second for Jesus to respond, “Go, your faith has made you well.”

And as Mark tells us, he immediately regained his sight, and became a follower of Jesus.

Jesus recognized the deep faith that Bartimaeus held with in his heart, that God would heal him and help him to see again. He used to see clearly, but somehow lost his sight, lost his way, and now is restored and made whole. His faith has made him well. It would be the final miracle for Jesus and deeply symbolic of all his miracles.

Blindness means far more than simply a physical loss of sight in one’s eyes. It is also symbolic of spiritual blindness, the kind of blindness that creeps up on one, the more one pays attention to one’s own needs and concerns, and less attention to God’s.

In a way, Bartimaeus could see far better than some with 20/20 vision. His faith led him not only to believe in Jesus’ healing powers, but also led him to see into himself and his need for mercy. His need for renewal and his need for forgiveness. He doesn’t have much to his name, but whatever he had, he made up his mind to leave it all behind in order to follow Jesus. Bartimaeus became part of the cloud of witnesses, a disciple, among a crowd of disciples, seeking nothing more for himself but the gift of insight and, as he threw off his cloak, he had the vision to throw off any doubt, any skepticism, or unbelief. You could say, Bartimaeus became part of his own miracle.

Bartimaeus may have been blind in a physical sense, but he could see what he had to do clearly. He had to look deep into himself to find the courage to yell out his own need for mercy, no matter how stupid he might have appeared to the people around him, no matter how embarrassed he might have felt himself. All that was cast aside as he “saw” the One who could save him from himself. He knew who and what Jesus was. He had no doubts, just absolute faith and he decided in that instant, to make himself heard, no matter what. We could say this is the lesson, Bartimaeus is teaching us today. To be courageous in our prayer life, to be sure of what it is we are asking God to do for us.

When Jesus asks you, “What do you want me to do for you?” it is not the time to ask Jesus to make you feel better because you just don’t want to feel out of sorts anymore. Prayer is both confession and admission of inability to see what it is we need to see in order to enter into our own miracle. We are so easily blinded to our own need for mercy and forgiveness. We cannot believe that we are sinners. We do our best, of course, yet we are not very good at seeing into the truth of so many situations in the crowd around us. How is it that we too often cannot see anyone else’s truth, due to our own blindness?

Please, Jesus, help me. Help me be less angry, less envious, less resentful, less judgmental, less depressed, less dependent, less ……

We don’t sit down and wait for problems to melt away with no help from ourselves, expecting Jesus to simply fix things. In a way, like using Jesus as some sort of emotional, physical, magical handyman. Bartimaeus said, “My teacher, let me see again.” Likewise, we may pray, “My teacher, help me once again, have the courage to accept my weakness and to find ways to strengthen myself. Teacher, let me find joy in that healing and be your presence by summoning joy in others again.” “Again,” said Bartimaeus. I used to be able to see, but have not for a very long time. “Let me see again.” And we say the same. Let me be all that you want me to be…. again. The way I know I was before I allowed myself to drift into ways and attitudes, perspectives and directions that not only harm the beauty that is me, but harm my relationships, and my ability to see clearly the beauty of others.

Jesus never forces what God wants or wills upon any of us . Jesus well knew Bartimaeus was blind but he made no assumption that Bartimaeus viewed his lack of sight to be his particular handicap in life, which is why Jesus asked him the question he did.

The question carries with it profound cause for searching deeper into our own hearts and souls in order to know what it is we are asking God to do for us.

Perhaps we should try to see what Bartimaeus is teaching us about our own blindness and ability to see.

What is it we could say to Jesus when he asks us, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Lord Jesus, please help us to rebuild our church? No answer. Clearly not what Jesus thinks we need to be asking. Again, he asks, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Jesus, could you make us a little richer so that we could afford a really good organist?

Uhmmmm….that doesn’t seem to have quite the right tone, because we can hear the question being repeated, “What do you want me to do for you?”

This must be it. Help us to be really good our at ministries so that we know we are doing good work for you. Help us to be more loving of others.

Nothing coming. “What do you want me to do for you?”

This time, with a voice that is filled with compassion, as we begin to strip away layers that have no meaning for anyone except ourselves and certainly not God, we hear the voice of Jesus,

“What do you want me to do for you.”

And we are left with nothing more to say that , “My teacher, let me see.”

Jesus is waiting for us to throw off our cloaks of hiding, just like Bartimaeus and come out into the open, blinders off, into the light, so that we can truly see the real meaning of Godly love. How we are loved by God and by others. Let us not just know, but see, how deeply everyone needs and deserves to know they are loved, how beautifully singular and significant they are to God, and how beautifully made. Let us see the source of that love and let us rejoice in the knowing of it. Let us become part of our own miracle of life, co-creators with God the Creator, Jesus Christ our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit, sanctifier of the very air we breathe. “My teacher, let me see again,” as I did as a child, with innocent gratitude and faithful acceptance.

As we consider our own journeys of faith, and our desire to be healed by Jesus, it is well for us to remember the relationship between our call to discipleship or ministry, and the healing one receives intrinsically from faithful response to God’s call. Perhaps we don’t feel we are worthy of God’s call to any ministry in God’s name. We don’t think we have the right gifts, or know-how, we don’t have enough time or life is to chaotic or confusing for us to respond, it is all challenging enough. How could we ever be like Bartimaeus and throw off our cloaks of hesitation, of rationalization, in order to be as outrageously faithful as he was. Are we too “unhealed” to be healed? Is it too late for us to capitulate to that kind of absolute faith? Do we dare? Do we have enough courage?

In the famous words of Matthew (11:28)

“Hear the Word of God to all who truly turn to him.

Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and
I will refresh you. “

All you who are hurting, burdened down by the world and by your own lack of insight into who you are and what it is you want God to do for you, can Jesus hear your voice calling for mercy?

“Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me” we cry out, knowing that we will be heard and knowing that we will be asked the question, “What do you want me to do for you?” We are called, and those around us see and hear the call too, and then, even though we were blind, we now can see, and we begin the walk of faith, following Jesus on the way.

Teacher, open my eyes, take the darkness from my sight, take away the closed doors of my heart, so that even though I was blind I now can see again.

A poem by Langston Hughes:

**I look at the world**

I look at the world

From awakening eyes in a black face—

And this is what I see:

This fenced-off narrow space

Assigned to me.

I look then at the silly walls

Through dark eyes in a dark face—

And this is what I know:

That all these walls oppression builds

Will have to go!

I look at my own body

With eyes no longer blind—

And I see that my own hands can make

The world that's in my mind.

Then let us hurry, comrades,

The road to find.

Amen.

Written to the Glory of God

E. J. R. Culver+

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