

“BLIND VISION”
The Rev. Victor Kim
Mark 10:46-52
(10-24-21)

The quantum physicist Arthur Zajonc, in his book called, **“Catching the Light, The Entwined History of Light and Mind,”** asserts that **sight and vision are two different things.** He states that from both animal and human studies we know there are critical developmental windows in the first years of life. Sensory and motor skills are formed, and if this early opportunity is lost, trying to play catch up is hugely frustrating and mostly unsuccessful. Zajonc writes of studies which investigated recovery from congenital blindness. Thanks to corneal transplants, people who had been blind from birth would suddenly have functional use of their eyes. Nevertheless, success was rare. Referring to one young boy, Zajonc writes, the world does not appear to the patient as filled with the gifts of intelligible light, color, and shape upon awakening from surgery. Light and eyes were not enough to grant the patient sight. The light of day beckoned, but no light of mind replied within the boy’s anxious, open eyes.

Another doctor involved in the study observed that while surgery gave the patient the power to see, the employment of this power, which as a whole constitutes the act of seeing, still has to be acquired from the beginning. To give back sight to a congenitally blind person is more the work of an educator than of a surgeon.

Zajonc sums up, **the sober truth remains that vision requires far more than a functioning physical organ. Without an inner light, without a formative visual imagination, we are blind. That inner light, the light of the mind, must flow into and marry with the light of nature to bring forth a world.**¹

Vision is not merely a matter of seeing. It is very much the case that there are people who are unable to see physically but who are visionaries nonetheless. And conversely, there are far too many people in our world who have the gift of sight, but have no vision. The healing of Bartimaeus, our text from Mark’s gospel this morning, is a story of a man given back his sight, **but more than that it is a story of a man finding a vision.**

Our text follows immediately after the request of James and John, two of Jesus’ disciples, who seek to be given places of honour next to Jesus. Jesus reminds all the disciples that in order to be great one must be the servant of all, just as he himself, the Son of Man, did not come to be served, but to serve. And now as Jesus and his disciples were making their way to Jerusalem, through Jericho, they happened to pass by Bartimaeus, the blind beggar. Bartimaeus may have been blind, but there was nothing wrong with his hearing.

¹ Arthur Zajonc, *Catching the Light: the Entwined History of Light and Mind.* Bantam Books, 1993

He had heard of the stories of Jesus, this man who could heal, who had made the lame to walk, who had cleansed the lepers clean, who had driven out demons and even raised the dead. And when he heard that it was Jesus who was coming down the road, Bartimaeus didn't let the opportunity pass.

As Jesus neared, Bartimaeus began shouting, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Jesus have mercy on me! The others around him predictably told him to shut up. Stop making a scene. But Bartimaeus only shouted louder. **Son of David, have mercy upon me!**

If I close my eyes I can almost picture the scene in my mind. The main sense I get is that of movement. There is a crowd, a large crowd, following Jesus. Remember this is just prior to his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The excitement and expectation surrounding Jesus has been building up for some time now. The streets are filled with those who wanted to get a glimpse of this supposed messiah, with disciples and hangers on following Jesus. The dust rises beneath the feet of such a crowd, choking the already desperately thin air. It's noisy beyond belief. Animals share the roads with those making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

And in the rattle and hum of such a scene a voice shouts out louder than the rest, more desperate than the rest, Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, shouting as if his life depended on it, **because his life did depend on it**, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me, have mercy on me!" **And Jesus stopped. I love it, Jesus stopped. In the midst of everything that was going on, Jesus stopped.** He heard Bartimaeus, and he stopped. And he said to those around him, call him. Those who had been telling Bartimaeus to be quiet now called to him to stand up. Bartimaeus, this is your lucky day. Get on your feet. Jesus is calling you. Bartimaeus did not have to be told twice. Up to his feet he leapt and throwing aside his cloak and he came to Jesus.

Jesus looked at Bartimaeus and asked him, **what do you want me to do for you?** It's the same question that Jesus had asked of James and John in response to their request that he should do for them whatever they asked. **What do you want me to do for you?** Bartimaeus' answer is the answer of a man who knows what his greatest need is. "Rabbi, I want to see." I want to see. I don't want to sit on your right hand or your left hand in glory, I don't want to be the greatest, I don't care about position or power or privilege, I just want to see. What a contrast from the answer of the disciples, and I do think that Mark places these two stories back-to-back for maximum effect. **Blindness is a condition which too often afflicts the seeing. Spiritual blindness too often afflicts those who seem to have the easiest access to God. Sometimes it takes an outsider, someone on the fringes of society, on the edge of acceptability, to open our eyes to our real need.**

Like the disciples, we inside the church, can often be blind to our real need for Jesus. Perhaps it's our proximity to Jesus which prevents us from having a clearly defined need for him.

Perhaps, unlike the Bartimaeus' of our world, we're not desperate enough. **Perhaps in our blind vision we have lost sight of our perspective.** Jesus asks, what do you want me to do for you, and we waffle with our answers, debating whether we should ask for position, prosperity, power, respect, greatness when our answer should be the same as Bartimaeus', **Lord, we want to see.**

We have to admit our blindness in order for Jesus to grant us true vision. I said that the story of Bartimaeus is not only a story of sight, but one of vision. When Bartimaeus asks to be able to see, Jesus says to him, go, your faith has healed you. **And here's the most remarkable part of the whole story. Jesus says to go, but Bartimaeus stays.** Jesus has given Bartimaeus his sight, his ability to rejoin his society, his freedom to do whatever he pleases, **but Bartimaeus chooses to have more than just mere sight, he chooses to have a vision. He stays and follows Jesus on the way.**

Vision isn't merely having sight. Vision is the marriage of light and mind to bring forth a world. Vision, for Bartimaeus is the gift of sight, but also the gift of a faith that Jesus affirms in him, which together brings forth a worldview that sees Jesus as the Christ, **which will allow Bartimaeus to join him on the way,** on the way to Jerusalem, on the way to service and sacrifice, on the way to pain and suffering, on the way to humiliation and death, **on the way to the cross, on the way to resurrection, on the way to new life.**

We live in a busy world and as we emerge from the pandemic, it's going to get a whole lot busier. There's a lot of noise and movement all around us. **But here in this sanctuary, here in this quiet place, Jesus stops for us. And he calls us to him and asks us, what do you want me to do for you?** What is our answer, what is your answer? What do we want Jesus to do for us as a church, as Richmond Presbyterian Church? Rather than asking for numerical growth or financial stability, rather than seeking merely to continue in our existence, **what if we were to ask for vision?**

We're living in strange times. Churches all over the world are trying to figure out what comes next, how this global pandemic has and will continue to impact the church. RPC is in the same situation. We're still building back our congregation. But we won't really know when we will fully be back or what we will look like when we are. We're doing more than we could when we couldn't meet in person, but still a lot less than we used to do. We won't do some of the things we used to do and hopefully we will do some new things we've never done before.

But we need to remember and give thanks that God still loves God's church and that God is not finished with us yet. There is still much to do, there is still much to learn. There is still much God wants to show us and still much that will be expected of us. **All of this requires vision, not merely a blind vision, seeing without imagination, but true vision, a combining of our sight with our faith, envisioning what God has in mind for us.** It means a willingness to

jump up, throw aside our protective cloaks and follow Jesus on the way. **It means to be a church open to following where Jesus will lead us, on the way to service and sacrifice,** perhaps even pain and suffering, humiliation, and death, even to the cross, so that we will also know with Christ his resurrection and new life.

Asking for vision is no inconsequential matter. It means being open to the Bartimaeus' of our world, not telling them to be quiet, but bringing to them the love and grace of Jesus Christ, serving them and caring for them, stopping for them as Jesus stops for us. **Ask yourself, when's the last time you stopped for someone? Maybe we ought to think why we don't stop more often.** Asking for vision means that we have to admit that perhaps we aren't as desperate as we need to be about our real need for Jesus. **It means reassessing the condition of our faith.**

As part of the Bible Study on the Lord's Prayer, I asked two different groups when they found it hardest to pray. I thought the answers would have something to do with tragedy or loss or frustration. **But instead, both the in-person bible study group and the online study group answered that they found it hardest to pray when things were going well.** When all seemed good, when we were happy, stable, secure, that's when it was most difficult to pray. I mean why pray when we have everything we need? **I wonder whether that's what it's like for us as a church?** Have we lapsed into a blind vision, of seeing without imagination, without faith? Have we become too familiar with who we think Jesus is or what he asks of us? Have we stopped being interested in continuing to reform? Has our proximity to Jesus, our familiarity with the vestiges of worship, led to a faith high on appearances but low in substance?

Being granted a vision means having the freedom to do what we want, but choosing to follow Jesus, being free to go but wanting to stay. It means seeking ways to serve, seeking ways to give, having the imagination to grow and move into an uncertain future, not shying away from pain or hurting or suffering, getting our priorities straight and following Jesus on the way.

As we continue to follow God's Spirit to be the church God desires, I pray that we may be a church that not merely sees but has a vision. "Deep with God, Wide with the World." That's the kind of people we say we want to be. So then, may we be a congregation that will use this time of newness to shake off any complacency that has built up in us and recommit to follow Jesus deeper wherever he may take us and to serve the people Jesus loves as the Son of Man himself served us. **What do you want me to do for you, asks Jesus. May our collective answer to him be, Lord, we want to see!**

Thanks be to God, Amen.