

## Sermon Pentecost 22B, 2021

I begin by asking you how often have you said, 'I see' meaning you understand whatever it is you have been told? But sometimes "I see" can be taken literally. Recently I had an experience where both were true. When we were staying with my sister in England, we were in this tiny English village called Much Wenlock. One feature was that there were at least 10 hiking trails which began and ended at the old Guild Hall, and then instructed the hiker to go down little walkways between houses, around fields, up and down hills, and often through kissing gates (lots of those!) I enjoyed hiking at least one of them daily. On one such occasion I had got to the top of a little hill, turned left at the post, and then, as instructed, to walk beside a hedge at the edge of a field, and pass a caravan site on my left. But all I could see were fields and more fields. Oh dear! But I trusted the instructions and continued. At the end of that field, through the hedge I saw a few caravans. Phew! I continued on, and of course reached the village again. Yes, I had tried to understand the instructions even though I had doubts, until I saw the caravans.

In our Gospel today "seeing" as understanding is very prominent. The scene is Jericho, a major town about 15 miles from Jerusalem which was to Jesus and his followers the last stop before arriving at Jerusalem. You might think walking another 15 miles would have been a huge challenge but coming from Galilee, about 70 miles from Jerusalem, they knew they were nearly there! The crowd lining the roadway acclaimed Jesus as he was leaving and must have told blind Bartimaeus about him. Jesus of Nazareth had been in town, was what they must have said. Now, think about who Bartimaeus was; he was a blind beggar. He was someone with zero status in their society and because of this he was deemed a big sinner. The understanding, the insight, of the people of that time was that his disability and status were inflicted on him because he had committed so many sins that God punished him thus. Poor man. The crowd expected such a man to remain silent, huddled up in some corner, out of the way. But wherever he was sitting he wanted Jesus to know he was there. If this Jesus with a reputation for healing the sick was around, he wanted Jesus to know he needed healing. So, he yelled out. We see it seems he understood Jesus to be the special man, born of the lineage of King David just like the expected Messiah. He yelled out his request, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" What he asked for was not for Jesus to heal his blindness but to have his sins forgiven, whatever they were. As you might expect the surrounding crowd were not merciful; they told him to "shut up." No one was on his side, no one cared for him. But the hearts of those people in that crowd were healed when they heard Jesus say, "Call him here." That was the first healing of the day. Jesus invited the people in that crowd to participate in the healing of Bartimaeus. And they responded. They changed from telling him to be quiet to encouraging him to go to Jesus. They said, "Take heart, get up, he is calling you."

Let's think about this a moment. Does it ring a bell in your head or heart? Has someone ever encouraged you to begin or continue in your journey to God? Alternatively, have you ever encouraged others on their journey to God? Jesus used people in that crowd to help the blind man come to him. Jesus can similarly use you if you ask him to. I invite you to reflect on the words the members of the crowd used, "... he is calling you." Jesus was calling Bartimaeus. Jesus calls people to come into ministry in many ways, for many opportunities. Have you thought how he is calling you today? Is he calling you to bring someone to him? Is he calling you to help someone see him, help someone into a relationship with him? Maybe he is calling you to be an example of Jesus for others in that who you are, in what you do and in how you do it they can see Jesus. You can make a real positive difference in the life of others, even one other. Remember, Jesus called one person at a time. How is he calling you today?

As you heard Bartimaeus got up and went to Jesus. He even threw off his precious cloak, the one garment which kept him warm at night, but would hinder him hurrying through a crowd, to where Jesus was. What you note is that Jesus did not heal his blindness as a matter of course. Jesus must have

been very aware that his plea to Jesus was, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” He wanted forgiveness of his sins as the primary healing. But he also knew that if his blindness was healed it would be assumed his sins had been forgiven. Jesus began by asking him, “What do you want me to do for you?” To this question, Bartimaeus said, “My teacher, let me see again.” Bartimaeus must have known by this time that his sins had been forgiven. His sins, whatever they were, and of course we would accept that no sins he committed had actually brought about his blindness, had been forgiven.

Have you had a time when you felt the need for forgiveness and then received that gift from God, the gift of being set free? Sin, the things you do and say and write which are wrong can weigh on your conscience. Have you spoken with God about them? They may have been there for many years, just festering, just gathering in corners in your heart, but troubling. You like Bartimaeus can say, or shout, “have mercy on me.” What you know and need to remember for all time is that God listens. Maybe God does not reply in the way you expect or wish, but I believe God always listens. Sharing what is on your heart and mind, what is troubling you is something you can do at any time.

But maybe that is not you. So, what would you ask for when Jesus says to you, “What do you want me to do for you?” Would you ask for your health to continue well – forever or for the next however many years or forever. But humans do not live forever so you have a problem with this request. Or, if that seems selfish, would you ask for healing for one person or another? If so who, and then who would you neglect? Or would your requests be channeled for Messiah? Would you ask for Messiah to have successful ministries or be in a better financial position or have...? Would this be for this year, next year? Again, how would you respond to Jesus’ question. “What do you want me to do for you?” Maybe the best answer is similar to that of Bartimaeus, “My teacher let me see.” When you ask Jesus for the ability to see what you can do in this world, in this community, at Messiah, for your family and friends and for yourself you can grow into the person God had created you to be. Your response means you want the insight to really look and understand how you can make a difference for Jesus here and now. Using eyesight and other senses you can be aware of the needs of others, of our world and your role using your gifts and talents.

This is the month of stewardship here at Messiah. We ask you to consider your relationship with God and your participation in the life of Messiah. This month different members have shared, and will share, “What Messiah means to me” and we have greatly appreciated listening to what they have said. Have you spent time on this same question yourself? Can you see how your membership has made a difference and could make a difference? Are there ministries which you could help with, programs you could lead or support?

Let us finally reflect on what Jesus said to Bartimaeus after healing him. “Go; your faith has made you well.” Has your faith helped you through difficult times? Has an awareness of God been with you that has carried you through them?

And remember what Bartimaeus did. After he regained his sight, he became a follower of Jesus. His experience of the healing and compassionate love of Jesus changed him. He became a follower. We know this because we know his name. Almost all the men and women Jesus healed are unnamed. They were there for healing and then went on their way. But someone who joined the group would have been known to the group, known to the Gospel writers. Such a one was Bartimaeus.

Unless you are new to Messiah, you are known here of course. You are known and loved as a follower of Jesus. Doesn’t that feel good. You can say, “I am a follower of Jesus, and my church members know me.” You are known by all of us here and you know other members too who are here. The more ways in which you connect with others the more ways they will connect with you. Today using the insight, the seeing power God is giving you, I invite you to use it to see how you can make a difference here. Maybe there is someone who is lonely, who would love a friend they can trust to talk to.

Today ask Jesus to guide you. And like Bartimaeus commit yourself to following Jesus, and the way to follow is close in his footsteps. I close by sharing the words of Richard of Chichester, "O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother, May I See thee more clearly, Love Thee more dearly, Follow Thee more nearly, Day by day."  
Amen.

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