

Homily: Mark 10:46-52
Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta, GA
Sunday, October 24, 2021
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The problem with being blind is that you don't know what you are not seeing. Imagine living with your eyes closed for one day. But, even those of us with excellent eyesight can struggle with other forms of blindness. We can see things upside down. Consider this humorous reminder of that possibility.

"During his lifetime, Henri Matisse was revered as the founder of the Fauvist movement and hailed as one of the twentieth century's greatest painters. However, the French artist could have found out exactly how much his art was really appreciated on October 19, 1961. On that day the Museum of Modern Art accidentally hung Matisse's "Le Bateau" (The Boat) upside down. The ship, so to speak, capsized along with the museum's reputation. Forty-four days and over 116,000 viewers later, the mistake was finally corrected."

[*Life Stinks: A Wry Look at Hopelessness, Despair, & Disaster*, ed. Ted Mico (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1995), pp. 20-21.]

What do we have upside down in our vision? We can live unaware of what we are not seeing and with our inner eye closed—not open in mind to see the new, not open in heart to embrace it, and not open in will to follow it. Can we question our perspective about ourselves, others, and this community of faith or are we so locked in to old perspectives that we're seeing upside down?

In today's Gospel, a blind man hears that Jesus is approaching and realizes what he is not seeing. The possibility of a new future pulls him from his past and transforms his life. Mark has placed this transitional story between an episode in which the disciples' misunderstand Jesus and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where the crowd also lacks clarity about Jesus. Bartimeaus' blindness alerts us to our own blind spots.

Like Bartimeaus we are pulled by the promise of a new future. Jesus and his followers were journeying to Jerusalem for Passover. The large crowds of pilgrims would attract a beggar. Once Bartimeaus heard Jesus was in a cry out for mercy. The crowd tried to shush him so that they could hear what Jesus might be saying as he passed. But, Bartimeaus persevered, crying out loudly, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

The crowd saw only a blind beggar. But, Bartimeaus believed he could be more than he was. He believed he could see again, and he believed Jesus could make it happen. A new possible future drew near.

What might be possible for you and me? What new green might be emerging that goes beyond our biggest dreams? Can we be more than we are now? Can we find freedom, forgiveness, transformation, purpose?

The crowd saw only the familiar beggar. Bartimeaus saw more was possible. The discouragers did not deter him. How much dis-couragement are you receiving from those who see only what they think you are and nothing more? Each of us carries labels and curses affixed to us by others, sometimes by those closest to us. Can we be more than those thought we could be? Are we already more than they knew or saw? Can we be pulled forward by that possibility?

We can be lulled into apathy by what we've always seen at Christ Church, who we always have thought we were. There lies our blind spot, blinded by the familiar.

Hegel said, "Generally, the familiar, precisely because it is familiar, is not known." This is a powerful sentence. Behind the facade of the familiar, strange things await us. This is true of our homes, the place where we live, and indeed, of those with whom we live. . . . We reduce the wildness and mystery of person and landscape to the external, familiar image. Yet the familiar is merely a facade. Familiarity enables us to tame, control, and ultimately forget the mystery. We make our peace with the surface as image and we stay away from the Otherness and fecund turbulence of the unknown that it masks. Familiarity is one of the most subtle and pervasive forms of human alienation."

[John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 90-91.]

Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.
 What would you have me do for you?
 Go, your faith has made you well.

Like Bartimeaus, we can be pulled from the captivity of an old past.

The beggar overcame opposition. No one in the crowd saw what he saw. What might we come to see about ourselves, God, the world, our church that no one else sees? How can we push against the dis-couragers and persist in our quest for what we know is possible.

Bartimaeus left his cloak—spread out before him, probably with alms on it. He followed Jesus in the way after being healed, and Mark does not mention that he went back to Discipleship calls us to let go of whatever we are clinging to, that we take the risk of new ways of thinking, of new ways of behaving. Now that he could see and had let go, he could follow. So, can we.

What cloaks must we throw aside?

Old ways of seeing and conceptualizing Jesus. They had to let go a political agenda—redefined their discipleship. Have you read the four Gospels? Have you read a good book about Jesus? Have you asked yourself “What is my understanding of Jesus?” Your understanding controls your view of your obligation and of what might be possible through Jesus.

Old tired definitions of ourselves individually— our blind spot.
Listen to the positive feedback you receive from those closest to you.
Listen to your dreams.
Reflect on your best actions and achievements and what they say about you.

Old tired agendas for our corporate lives
Hear what the newest parishioners have to say about what they see.
Interim clergy bring a fresh, outside perspective
Diocesan staff have a long history of observation to share
Pay very close attention to what surfaces during our conversations and self study during this transition time, esp. to what you push against.

We can question our old and tired habits of seeing, thinking and expecting. We tend to dismiss what the newcomers and those outside the parish tell us in our captivity to the familiar, our blind spot.

Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.
What do you want me to do for you?
Go, your faith has made you well.

Conclusion

What pictures have been hanging upside down in your vision?
Our prayer – “Lord, that I might see again.” What would you ask Jesus for today? He invites us all to call out for his mercy and to seek to be more through his grace than we ever have been.

Searching for God

**O Lord my God,
Teach my heart this day where and how to see you,
where and how to find you.
You have made me and remade me,
and you have bestowed on me
all the good things I possess,
and still I do not know you.
I have not yet done that for which I was made.
Teach me to seek you,
for I cannot seek you unless you teach me,
or find you unless you show yourself to me.
Let me seek you in my desire,
let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you,
let me love you when I find you.**

[St. Anselm (1033-1109CE), *Saint Benedict's Prayer Book* (York: Ampleforth Abbey Press, 1993), p. 118]