

“What Do You Want to See?”
B, Pentecost 23; Mark 10:46-52
October 28, 2018; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

I. DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

Two psychiatrists were talking and one asked the other,
"What was your most difficult case?"

His colleague answered, "Once I had a patient who lived in a pure fantasy world. He believed that a wildly rich uncle in South America was going to leave him a fortune. All day long he waited for a make-believe letter to arrive from a fictitious attorney. He never went out or did anything. He just sat around and waited."

"What was the result?" asked the first psychiatrist.

"Well, it was an eight-year struggle but I finally cured him.

And then that stupid letter arrived..."

(Billy D. Strayhorn, From the Pulpit)

What do we see, when we open our eyes? When we open our minds to seeing in new directions? With eyes and hearts open to big dreams deemed “pure fantasies” by the naysayers in the crowd?

And no, I’m not talking about the Lottery kind of big dreams! And no, I didn’t win that billion-plus-dollar prize. I don’t think anyone around here did, right?!

Mark Twain, 19th century

"You cannot depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus."

II. FOR THREE DAYS I WILL SEE

Helen Keller, so brave and inspiring to us in her deafness and blindness, once wrote a magazine article entitled: "Three days to see." In that article she outlined what things she would like to see if she were granted just three days of sight. It was a powerful, thought provoking article. On the first day she said she wanted to see friends. Day two she would spend seeing nature. The third day she would spend in her home city of New York watching the busy city and the workday of the present. She concluded it with these words: "I who am blind can give one hint to those who see: Use your eyes as if tomorrow you were stricken blind."

III. FOR THE FIRST TIME I WILL SEE

Bar Timaeus, son of Timaeus, didn’t ever have any days of sight. Until today. And, as rough as life was for Helen Keller (she was deaf and mute as well), or sight impaired ones today, it was another whole thing in Jesus’ day.

Today a blind person at least has the hope of living a useful life with proper training. Some of the most skilled and creative people in our society are blind. But in first century Palestine blindness meant that you would be subjected to abject poverty. You would be reduced to begging for a living. You lived at the mercy and the generosity of others.

Hear Bart's story again, imagining the context and what his life has been until this day, on this road.

Mark 10:46-52 The Message (MSG)

⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸ They spent some time in Jericho. As Jesus was leaving town, trailed by his disciples and a parade of people, a blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was sitting alongside the road. When he heard that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by, he began to cry out, "Son of David, Jesus! Mercy, have mercy on me!" Many tried to hush him up, but he yelled all the louder, "Son of David! Mercy, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹⁻⁵⁰ Jesus stopped in his tracks. "Call him over."

They called him. "It's your lucky day! Get up! He's calling you to come!" Throwing off his coat, he was on his feet at once and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ Jesus said, "What can I do for you?"

The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

⁵² "On your way," said Jesus. "Your faith has saved and healed you."

In that very instant he recovered his sight and followed Jesus down the road.

I wonder what old Bart looked at first, when he could see for the first time in his life? Would he, like Helen Keller, looked around for the people in his life? The faces of friends and foes alike? Would he have looked for a baby, a dog, books, the woods, a sunset? Would he have sought laughter and beauty? What did life look like for him as he now followed Jesus on the Way.

This healing was the last one Jesus did on the way to Jerusalem. Bart got in under the wire, so to speak! Now everyone who is "on the road with Jesus" is literally on the road toward suffering and crucifixion; toward laying down one's life in order to find life.

IV. A WEEK OF OPPORTUNITIES

If you suddenly had new eyes, how would you use them? For any amount of time – for three days or for forever – just imagine. This week I had the opportunity to see and hear things "outside of my ken," as it were. People and places different from my world experience, or outside my usual circle.

The first was a Trans person at the gas station mini-mart in Fairplay. I'd been hearing how our trans brothers and sisters were once again living in fear due to proposed discriminatory laws and definitions. I thought how often we "other" people that we don't understand, and also think "they" live somewhere else – outside of our circle.

And right there, waiting on me, as sweet as could be, was a young trans woman in a small mountain town. Wanting to be seen, to serve humanity and be part of the mainstream of life.

Another opportunity arose throughout the week to see with new eyes into a country far away called Iraq.

Iraq – John Shuck. Presbyterian pastor from Portland Invited by Islamic Center he’s built a relationship with in Seattle.

Arbaeen –an event of beauty – the largest peace and love march on Earth!

--Three days of walking—thousands of people—walking for peace.

--Everyone spends weeks making food for the Pilgrimage, and it is served everywhere at no charge.

--Iraq—that place that we only hear of wars and terrorism; with a hard to read or hear language. So dangerous! Why would anyone want to go *there*?

I was curious about this trip and had heard about it for weeks, but seeing John’s posts on Facebook, I was a little overwhelmed by it all! Trying to understand what the various names and terms meant that he was using. Trying to get my head around all I was seeing in the vivid and dramatic pictures. Trying to grasp why he felt called to go to this place about as different from our culture and climate as you could get.

I found I scanned by them quickly. That my heartbeat would rise just a little at the pictures. They were so

dark and yet exotic; so different-looking than our pics – intriguing, yet frightening.

And I realized that I was having a fearful reaction to those sights. It was jolting me to see pictures of Iraq – with dark-skinned and dark haired and bearded people—as well as dark headdresses for some of the women –with captions about beauty, generosity, devotion, love and hope, warm welcome, and hints of humanity at its best.

There were also pics where Rev. John Shuck, as Caucasian as they come, middle-aged white guy – flanked, smiling and joined in ministry with an array of skin tones, ethnicities, religious clothing and symbols. He spoke at every turn of the incredible warm and sincere welcome he received. As an American. As a Christian pastor. Citizens of Iraq embraced him and were so eager to talk and open his eyes to their hearts and hopes.

I realized that I had never *seen* pictures of Iraq or learned about its traditions through the eyes of anything or anyone except our mainstream media! And what is the topic of *any* news story on Iraq? ISIS, wars with their neighbors, conflict of many kinds. We hear how they’re *not* our ally and look and act very different than us. Dark. Foreign. To be feared.

I acknowledged my own prejudice and misperceptions and seek to learn more and continue to see and hear of cultures unfamiliar.

Closer to home, I got to see Charlotte twice on Thursday, as she drove herself to church for two different WMS events in one day. It was lovely to see her out and about and visit with her.

What caught my attention most, though, was that she said her new, younger neighbors (most everyone is younger than 97-year-old Charlotte!) had extended themselves to her awhile back and now they were cooking for her often and loving on her and treating her like a Grandma – much to everyone’s delight.

They *saw* her. This neighbor of theirs who lives alone and they saw a potential friend, rather than a stranger, and welcomed her into their circle and home.

V. WHAT DO WE WANT TO SEE and HEAR?

When Bart comes to Jesus, first the crowd squelches his reaching out. They try to shush him up.

Embarrassed by the noise he’s making and convinced of his unworthiness. Then he resists their attempts, and cries out to Jesus even louder. And what does Jesus do? He asks him a question.

“What do you want me to do for you?” And Bart answers: “I want to see.” And, Jesus asks a next question of Bart and of us that didn’t make it into the written scripture, but is posed to us in the walk of faith:

“What do you *want* to see?” and, as well, “What are you willing to hear?”

As we look around at our lives, our community and our world:

What voices are being squelched by the crowd that we need to hear? Voices that need to be heard – for the good of all? Need to be able to cry out to Jesus – Lord, have mercy on us! Who *are*, even now, crying out for mercy, for understanding, to be heard and welcomed into the community wholly? Who has been on the outside, wanting to participate in the Family of God, but the shushing voices still keep saying “No! You’re different. You can’t come into the circle. Can’t approach the Teacher and help us *all* open our eyes and be healed.

Where is “mob mentality” ruling the day, like the disciples and the crowd barring Bartimaeus from reaching Jesus? Barring those outside the circle from fully participating in the healing and restoring and new life together?

Where are we not seeing others who are different from us through Christ’s eyes – as fully human beings –made in the image God -- Imago Dei – that they are?

Who in this story and in our story needs to see? Is Bartimaeus the blind one in this story? We *think* he is, right? Like Doubting Thomas, he’s come down in history with a nickname he can’t shake! “Blind Bartimaeus.” But what if he’s the most sighted of anyone in the crowd? He knows there’s something about Jesus that’s worth calling out to – even though he can’t see him with his physical.

He sees from the heart, perhaps, knows in his soul that this man is of God and can help him. Maybe even heal him –inside and out. He knows that the crowd and their shushing him down and shutting him out *might* just have to be resisted! Shown a different story. Made to take him seriously and open *their* eyes to his right to be heard and healed; his God-given wholly whole personhood.

What about us? Where are we unwilling to listen; to see a fellow human being in our midst, and be in denial that he or she should have access to the Holy Healer and acceptance in the community – a whole person already – not just when they change to be more like us?

Maybe the truly blind in this story is everyone BUT Bart! He just happens to have an eye affliction. But, he sees from the heart, sees Jesus for who he is – his source of hope, healing and restoration to life. He may have the most open eyes of all!

Where are WE in this story? Where do we need our sight restored? To quiet the noise roaring around us and truly listen? Election Season is particularly “full of noise.” Full of “shushing out” those who most need to be heard.

Helen Keller: “At midnight, I would again be blind. Naturally in those there short days, I should not have seen all I wanted to see. Only when darkness had again descended upon me should I realize how much I had left unseen. But my mind would be crowded with glorious

memories. Thereafter the touch of every object would bring a glowing memory of how that object looked.

Perhaps this outline of how I should spend my three days of sight does not agree with the plan you would follow if you knew you were about to become blind. I am, however, sure that if you really faced that fate you would use your eyes as never before. Your eyes would touch and embrace every object that came within your range of vision. Then, at last, you would really see. A new world of beauty would open before you.

I who am blind can give one hint to those who see: Use your eyes as if tomorrow you would become blind. Use your other sense the same way. Hear the music of voices, the song of a bird as you would be deaf tomorrow. Touch each object as if tomorrow this sense would fail. Smell the perfume of flowers, taste each morsel, as if tomorrow you could never taste or smell again. Make the most of every sense. Glory in the pleasure and beauty the world reveals to you through your sense. But of all the sense, I am sure that sight must be most delightful.”

Challenge for us? Spend 3 days, or part of a day, anyway, and it doesn't have to be 3 days in a row. Look with open eyes into an issue, a culture or religion, or a group of people that you don't know much about. Seek first to understand. Open your eyes and ears and see and hear all you can about them. Look at the world through their eyes.

“What do you want to see?” Jesus asks us, as we continue on the road with him. “Where would you like to go, today?”

Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord. Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen. Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see You, Lord. Amen.