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Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

First Presbyterian Church
21 Church Street
Pittsford, NY 14534
www.pittsfordpres.org
(585) 586-5688

Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Weenink

TRANSITIONAL LENSES — 2020 Vision – IV

In the gospels, there are three accounts in which Jesus healed blindness. First, early in his ministry, Jesus healed two blind people. This was a sign that the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament had come true. John's gospel tells us about an encounter at the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus healed the man born blind and taught that he (Jesus) was the light of the world.

In this passage we come to the end of a major teaching section in Mark's gospel with the healing of Bartimeaus. If we read further, we will note the events of our Lord's passion. Three times Jesus explains what comes next. Three times the disciples reject and misread the point. No one seems to grasp his meaning. It is no accident that on his last encounter before entering into Jerusalem Jesus heals blindness—physical and spiritual.

Mark 10:46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimeaus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Prayer: May we be attentive to your wisdom and open to new understandings. Sharpen our insight and deepen our commitment. Give us eyes to see you, minds to know you and hearts to follow you.

Introduction

The widely read columnist late Ann Landers in the Washington Post accounted how blindness can reveal itself in a variety of ways and a variety of degrees. A certain woman was just about to step into the shower (and we all know our attire, or lack thereof when we do the same). The doorbell rang. She yelled, "Who is it?" A voice shouted back, "It's the

blind man." She figured it was safe, so she opened the door. Then came the awkward question, "Lady, Where do you want me to hang these blinds?"¹

We all have our blind spots

- In the car when we change lanes in traffic
- In our opinions when we fail to gather all the facts
- In our expressive and receptive language
- In the gaps between intention and impact

The disciples in this passage showed their 'blind spots.'

Bartimaeus

They are with Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. They go through Jericho. It's a crowded place, and Bartimaeus, no doubt, is not the only beggar on the road. Jesus has a lot on his mind. He knows the end is near. He knows that the worst suffering humanity can design awaits him in Jerusalem. He hears Bartimeaus shout.

His need is as obvious as the day is long. But Jesus still asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Rabbi, I want to see." Just a simple exchange—asking for the miraculous as though he were asking for the time of day—and Jesus gives a simple reply—"Go, your faith has made you well."

There is a very crucial nuance in the Greek translated: "made you well." The root of the word can mean heal AND save. "Your faith has saved you."

It is striking that just previous to this encounter, in Mark's narrative, James and John, two of the three disciples who were closest to Him, say: "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." Jesus responds, "What do you want me to do for you?" It's the same, exact question he asks Bartimaeus.

Where James and John say in essence we want you to serve us, Bartimaeus asks simply to be shown the way. In these two scenarios, it is the disciples who are blind, and the blind man Bartimaeus is the one who truly sees. Bartimaeus "saw" in Jesus someone who could heal him. He "saw" the possibility and grasped his opportunity, even though those around him attempted to squelch his shouts. James and John were spiritually blind; and when their story was over, they were still stumped by blind spots.

Recently I procured a new pair of reading glasses. They have Transitional Lenses, (light intelligent photochromic lenses) lenses so versatile, they transition from a clear lens indoors to shaded when exposed to UV rays or sunlight. They do it naturally without prompting or prodding. In the discipline of faith, God calls upon us to prevail with an outlook, a perspective, a perception that brings into focus God's providence.

Bartimaeus was not only given sight, but insight; and he transitioned from darkness to clear-eyed discipleship. He asks what Jesus had hoped his followers would ask. "Let me see clearly... Let me understand... Let me hear you. Tell me, Lord, what I do not know."

This man who had never once seen the sun's rays glancing off the golden towers of Jerusalem receives his sight. The miracle is not the restoration of sight. The "miracle" is that blind Bartimaeus has "seen" in Jesus the Christ – light, life – a way.

Faith is found where the spirit meets the bone, where your greatest need meets the invitation to arise and follow. Bartimaeus believed before he saw, believed before he knew, believed before the experience and his request was answered.

Conclusion

Every one of us here today is visually impaired to something in one way or another. All of us come to God out of a place of blindness, brokenness, and imperfection. We may not be physically blind, but we know that we all fall short of the glory that God intends for us. We were created for something much bigger than ourselves, and yet we most often settle for something far short of that. We are far too often blind to the bigger and broader and greater things God has in mind and we shortchange ourselves with our own shortsightedness. We've been talking a lot about vision 2020. I believe we can look forward to the revelations that God has in store for us with great optimism and hope. It may mean that we need to procure some transitional lenses.

The biblical witness shows us that every time there is a departure, there is a successor, there is something or someone to fill the void. When Moses dies, Joshua is there to lead the people. When Saul becomes disturbed, David is anointed. When Elijah leaves, Elisha takes over. When Jesus leaves this earth, the Holy Spirit descends on the apostles, and suddenly these inarticulate and often cowardly people become bold messengers of God's mighty acts.

Transitions are both fraught with peril and pregnant with possibility. They are spiritual syncopations. They are a stencil for the soul. And while transitions are disorienting, they may also give birth to transformation, new insight, and clearer vision.

May our 2020 vision, or, vision for 2020 be viewed through the transitional lenses of faith, hope, optimism, and gratitude.

1 Ann Landers, *The Washington Post*, October 13, 1998.