

Thomas R. Cook
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
9:00 and 11:00 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist
The Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost – October 25, 2015

“Not So Blind”

Scripture: Mark 10:46-52; 22 Pentecost B (Proper 25)

Note: Covenant Sunday with the receiving and blessing of pledges. Morning of the Celebration of a New Ministry (to take place at 4:30 p.m.)

Really, do we believe that Bartimaeus is the only person in this story who is blind? Then what about all the people around Bartimaeus who do the best they can to shush him up when they know he's in the presence of a healer, a wonderworker named Jesus who has been building a reputation for great acts of faith all around the villages and towns of Judea? Why don't they help Bartimaeus from his place on the ground and take him straight to Jesus? Well, I think it's because they must be blind too... in their own way. It isn't just that Bartimaeus can't see them, but they had stopped seeing Bartimaeus, a man of little account with nothing he could do besides beg the occasional handout from the people bustling along the road.

But Bartimaeus turns out to be not-so-blind as we may think. For though his eyes are darkened, his spirit still longs for the light, and nothing will still his voice if he thinks he has even the smallest chance to see again. That's right; apparently Bartimaeus wasn't always blind. He asks Jesus to let him see... again. And he is determined.

I remember once watching a man climb onto a city bus that I was riding. He carried that red and white walking stick of the sight disabled. He was clearly blind, entirely so, it appeared. But rather than plopping down in those front seats reserved for blind persons, I watched as he deftly navigated his way down the aisle, tapping and touching his way along, a hip brushing the edge of a seat here, a finger on the shoulder of another rider there, until he found an open seat nowhere really near the front. And only then did he sit down. And I wondered... had this man once known his sight? Perhaps he refused to give in entirely to his disability, and by a combination of memory and perseverance, he would challenge himself to hold on to some of the routines of a former life.

I think Bartimaeus remembers a time when he could see. And when he learns that Jesus is nearby, nothing will stop him from trying to see again. And clever Jesus... when he turns his own sight on Bartimaeus, he does not walk on his own able legs over to the blind man. Rather he tells the blind man he will have to come to him. "Call him here," Jesus says to the people. And by some astounding act of memory and perseverance, Bartimaeus does go to Jesus. In fact, he springs up! He tosses aside his cloak, which he might never find again as a blind man, but no matter... he moves toward the voice of the one who calls him. And in the presence of Jesus, he does see again.

New Beginnings are what we give thanks for this day, this Covenant Sunday, as the people of Saint Stephen's Church. Today, I hope our eyes are wide open. Because to open our eyes is to see all around us the extraordinary gifts and blessings we know as a community of faith in Jesus. I cannot overstate how astounded I am by the gracious and generous acts I already have witnessed in my short time with you. I have seen the way you have reached out to families when a loved one dies; I have experienced your energy for helping homeless persons or providing food to those who are hungry; I have visited the sick along side some of you; I have watched you lay the foundations for a renewed ministry to people just coming to be with Saint Stephen's Church; I have conferred with our senior members who are determined to help everyone thrive and make sure no one is forgotten as a part of this church family; our time in worship and music is vibrant and uplifting. That is only some of what I see.

But to open our eyes is also to see the needs we have to sustain this church community, so we can faithfully be about the work God is giving us to do with those who are with us and those beyond us. The financial challenges this church has experienced of late are real, but I feel as though it's like what Jesus did to Bartimaeus. He told Bartimaeus to get up and come to him. We have to make the faithful effort. And by some faithful act of memory and perseverance and generosity, we can get up

and address the financial needs of this community, each of us as we are able, and together we can follow Jesus where he would lead us in our day.

You know, when Bartimaeus says to Jesus, “Let me see again,” Jesus tells Bartimaeus to get on with his life, that his faith has made him well. I wish I could so easily dismiss the hurts and illnesses that are a constant companion to so many in this life, but maybe it’s not for me or for any of us to fix all that ails us. Rather it is ours to live faithfully, offering love and care whenever and wherever we see the need. That faith of which Jesus speaks to Bartimaeus belongs not to Bartimaeus alone. I believe that faith is a gift from God that lives in each of us, though it can sometimes be hard to see. My prayer today is that we will renew a commitment to open our eyes to the faith God has already shown in us... to see it, trust it, act on it. To “spring up” like Bartimaeus at the chance to become the new church we are once again called to be.