

Renewed Sight, Renewed Faith

October 29, In the Year of Our LORD, 2006

Gates Presbyterian Church

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Job 42:1-6; Psalm 34:1-8 and Mark 10:46-52

He was blind. He was cloaked. He was scared. Who blamed him for his angst, his fears, his bewilderment, his sense of loss

In the shadow of what I just read from the Gospel of Mark, to speak of someone as blind, cloaked and scared certainly relates to Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, who called out to Jesus for mercy and was cured of his blindness. But to say, he was blind, he was cloaked and he was scared applies to the two voices we heard in passages from the Books of Job and the Psalms. In so many ways, Job and David experienced moments of spiritual blindness, times when they were seemingly content to cloak themselves, that is hide themselves – from both God’s truths and life’s realities, and, as a result, live in scared if not scarred ways.

For the last couple of weeks, we have read from the Book of Job – first of his arrogance (thinking he was in a position to call upon God to explain our Creator’s ways) and then God’s reply from out of the whirlwind, out of the storm. Today, we read of Job’s contrition, his real, genuine humility, words that showed he knew he was wrong to question God, and that in the end, to belong to God, be part of God’s family is what really matters. The parallel in the Book of Job to our reading of how Bartimaeus received his sight is found in the fifth verse of that forty-second chapter of Job. In his confession, Job asserts, “now my eye sees You.”

There are so many examples of people in the Bible who were blind to the ways of God – and who, thankfully, had their spiritual sight restored. In listening to his three friends, in wondering and then complaining if not whining to God, Job allowed himself to forget and be blinded to God’s creative and restorative powers. Likewise, be it in the history found in I and II Samuel and the beginning of I Kings or in analogous passages written in his own words in many of the Psalms, David exhibited moments of sheer blindness. All too often, David surrendered to the human traps born of envy, pride and arrogance.

It was Bishop Mandell Creighton who, in 1887 wrote to Lord Acton the famous words: “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” David abused his authority as King. He used the cloak of absolute power to commit adultery with Bathsheba and to have Uriah killed. Power blinded him to the ways God wanted David to use his power for good and for blessedness. David suffered severe consequences for his behavior. He lost his supposed cloak of invincibility and his eyes were opened to his sinfulness ... and then to God’s judgment and grace. David was blind. David was cloaked.

We find arrogance disturbing if not revolting – and yet I want us to step back just for a moment and look at Job and David, examine their arrogance and at least wonder if it was not at least in part an attribute of their fear – their fear of the unknown, their fear that they might be unmasked in their vulnerabilities, in their humanness, in fear itself. Franklin Roosevelt’s famous words from his first Inaugural Address, “we have nothing to fear but fear itself” is all about attitude – and in this context is all about how we relate to our God and the promises our Creator makes.

If the ringing words from last week's reading from Job was when God, as paraphrased in the Contemporary English Version of the Bible said to Job: "why do you talk so much when you know so little," then today's corollaries are this:

- Why do you claim to know so much when you "see" so little?
- Why do you claim to be a follower of God, when you cloak yourself in the ways of humans – drown yourself in the ways of envy, greed, and want, if not gluttony?
- Why do you assert you are a Christian when you live in scared if not scarred ways?
- And ... why, knowing what you know, challenged by the lives of Job and David and the disciples and so many faithful people throughout time, do you *choose to remain blind to the calling of your God, cloak and hide yourself behind your self-serving and selfish ways, and then wonder why you are scared if not scarred in your fears, your loneliness, your hurts, your wants, your scrambling to find meaning in your life, when all you need do is surrender to God and God's ways.*

Just before our readings from Job and the Psalms, we sang, "Be Not Afraid." Be not afraid! Do not fear! Do not despair! Trust God! Live in God's promises of blessedness! And in words Joyful Noyz just sang, "Open the eyes of my heart, LORD." Remember these words?

Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth Thy hast for me;
place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for Thee, ready, my God, Thy will to see;
open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

But ... what if we don't want to see? What if we don't want to know what is happening in the Darfur region of the Sudan, in sectarian violence between Sunni and Shiite, in the streets of Rochester and Gates, the bullying in the hallways of our schools, or the petty arrogances and spats that drive a wedge among members of a family or members of a congregation – what if we choose to blind ourselves, cloak ourselves in our little worlds that allow us to disengage from any woe or sorrow that might engulf us, do we not, in our deciding to be blind and deaf, do more than embrace the ways of fear – do we not become less than human, less than what God calls us to be as those made in the Creator's Image, less than heartfelt followers of the Christ?

The tenth Chapter of the Gospel of Mark is so rich in its challenges! We read of the rich man who was so captured if not captivated by his possessions that he could not fully follow in the ways of Jesus and of the two disciples. That was followed by James and John who ignored Jesus' words about going to Jerusalem and being rejected and killed and instead talked of their own vain glory in sitting at Jesus' right and left hand. Only then do we read of poor Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, whose blindness was cured by a merciful Jesus! The significance of Jesus' miracles is that they *always* pointed to truths beyond the miraculous event itself. In this instance, Bartimaeus' healing points to God's invitation to Job, David, James, John, you, me, all who call upon God's name: open your eyes, be the responsive and giving humans God calls on you to be, renew your sight, be spiritually aware – and you will find your faith renewed.

Praise be to God, our Creator; to Jesus the Christ our Redeemer; and to the Holy Spirit Who empowers us today and all days to be the true and faithful followers we know we can be!

Amen.