

Mark 10:46-52

They came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus 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. (See also Job 42:1-6, 10-17)

"Let Me See Again"

When Timothy Tyson was in his mid 20s in the early 1980s he heeded a call that became clear to him through the lyrics of Bernice Johnson Reagon. "If in moving through your life, you find yourself lost, go back to the last place where you knew who you were." Timothy could not see the truth as he knew it, matching the structure and values of America. Where was cohesion between morality and society to be found for a teen who grew up in the height of Vietnam, Nixon, and the racial tension, bigotry, and violence prevalent in North Carolina where he lived? "If you find yourself lost" the lyrics cried out to him, "go back to the last place where you knew who you were." For Timothy that place was his backyard, after school, shooting some hoops with another ten year old friend. It was there he heard these words, "Daddy and Roger and 'em shot em' a nigger." His ten-year-old friend uttered these words as if all was normal and the world could continue after saying such a thing. Timothy was shaken to the core.

Henry Marrow, a black veteran, was beaten and shot by three men for supposedly saying something to a white woman. The year was 1970. What happened in Oxford was a modern day lynching. Though there were many eyewitnesses the three men were found innocent by an all white jury. Timothy's family, his father a liberal Methodist preacher, had to leave Oxford shortly after because of their views of racial equality. The Tysons ended up in another town even more embroiled in white resistance to desegregation. School fights, street fights, race violence all around marked Timothy through his junior high and high school years. In his early 20s he had just about given up on truth, on society, and on God, and almost drank and drugged himself into oblivion. The killing of five peaceful protestors in front of the media and a subsequent trial where the murders got off sparked within Timothy rage and a desire to go back to Oxford to uncover the truth of Henry Marrow's murder and the ensuing civil rights struggle in 1970.

For Timothy going back to Oxford, the last place where he knew who he was, where he could clearly see, was like following Jesus on the way to the cross. It was Timothy's own plea, let me see again! He needed to know the truth, for the truth sets us free. Timothy also had a growing desire to understand his family's place in white privilege. He desperately wanted redemption and without truth there can be no redemption. In an interview Timothy called *Blood Done Sign My Name*, which is a history and personal memoir, "A book about crucifixion." "Whose crucifixion?" the interviewer asked, "Henry Marrow's, Oxford's, mine." In Timothy's words his quest to understand and face the truth was an "effort to ring some redemption out of that." The redemption of Timothy's book has turned out to be not only for him, but for the whole Oxford community and for America. Like blind Bartimaeus we cry let us see again!

In Mark's gospel, when the blind see and the disciples are still clueless about Jesus, more is alluded to than functioning eyesight. There is more going on here than the need for glasses, cataract surgery, or a cure for macular degeneration. Mark is writing about a blind man whose sight is restored, but Mark is also writing about how the Truth is revealed to those who will see. Seeing the truth does not come easily to us.

This we know well. We've all lost our sight at some point or another. Most of us are working on claiming the truth that hits closest to home! We need new sight to relate to our spouses, our kids, our friends, our neighbors in a loving way. We need new sight to stomp our denial of injustice right here in our community. We need new sight to face an addiction, domestic violence, our own anger management or to get help for depression. Maybe we need new sight to see all the joy the world and others have to offer to our lives.

I've been wondering recently if anyone could really stand to see all truth clearly. Who can take in all the beautiful and brutal truth of our world? Yet here in our text we've got Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, who cries out to see again—to see it all. He wants exposure to the whole truth. Crazy!

We don't know when Bartimaeus lost his vision. What happened? Did he contract an eye disease or was it a workplace accident? Did he see clearly one day and then boom he was blind? Or was it a gradual process, a bit darker each day till he could see no more?

The story states Bartimaeus was the son of Timaeus. "Bar" means "son of." We know who his father was, yet Bartimaeus is "a blind beggar". Did his family throw him out because the loss of his sight made him a burden? Did they think he committed a sin that struck him blind? Or was he an only child and they could not care for him in their old age? Regardless of the circumstances, Bartimaeus is someone who knows society's rejection. He was a blind beggar. He knows what it feels like to be scorned and looked down upon. He already knows much about Jesus' way; reliance upon God.

What must have irked the people in the crowd was that Bartimaeus acted like a person with sight. He called out for mercy when all anyone wanted to give him was bread for the day or pocket change. Imagine demanding mercy instead of food! People tried to shut him up to no avail. "Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly." No one wanted to hear the appeals of Bartimaeus the blind beggar. The crowd was too busy following Jesus down some glory road. The blind man, with a hunger for mercy, was in their way.

Bartimaeus is a bit of a fool. We know what happens to those who want to see God clearly. Job asked to see God and he was silenced and spoken to by God who appeared in a tempest! When Job finally spoke to God in the tempest he confessed, "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know...I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now MY EYE SEES YOU; therefore I yield, and repent in dust and ashes." Those that really search for God, search for truth, do not have an easy journey. It's a blessed journey, but not an easy one.

This week the church celebrates Reformation Day and All Saint's Day. These are days for us to remember all the folks who passed on the church to us and to give thanks for them and their faith. It is also a time to recount their history truthfully. We give thanks for the Reformation and yet we lament the bloodshed and violence that immediately followed and the divisions between us within the body of Christ. We

remember the saints and admire them and we also remember they were only human, flawed as we are and were often wrong in their thinking about God as we are.

Bartimaeus called out for two things: mercy and sight. I think we need mercy if we are going to view the world and our lives with eyes of faith. Bartimaeus demanded mercy and in doing so he declared his faith not in society, but in God's goodness. "My teacher, let me see again." Bartimaeus cried. And Jesus said, "Go; your faith has made you well." Unlike Timothy Tyson whose faith walk took him to the past to claim truth, Bartimaeus chose to follow Jesus who was on the way to Jerusalem. The blind man, with a hunger to know mercy found he was on the way and his eyes were open to what was about to happen in a way the disciples hadn't glimpsed yet.

Mark lays it all out. The visually blind such as Bartimaeus can see God's ways more clearly than the disciples. What about us? Will we be up for the calling of our time? The call to regain our sight and follow Jesus on the way? Again and again, Mark's gospel shows us that the journey of the faithful with Jesus is fraught with blurriness, even blindness. If we are to see again, we'll have to rely on God's restoration of our sight as Bartimaeus did.

Which of us will write a history of truth that seeks redemption? Who will seek to see clearly here in our context? Will we leave it to the archeologists, anthropologists, sociologists...those studying from the outside and a distance? Or will we be co-authors of truth with an eye toward redemption with God as our guide? Oh God, let us see again! Amen.