

Sermon by the Very Rev. Timothy Jones  
Trinity Episcopal Cathedral  
October 28, 2018

Hebrews 7:23-28  
Mark 10:46-52

Have you ever looked and looked for something,  
and swore it wasn't there?  
Then somebody comes over and says,  
"Oh, it's right here."  
We'll say something like, "I must be blind."

I have a discovery to share about our experience  
with those missing socks and keys  
and reading glasses. Because some of us really are  
worse about that than others.

I'm imagining a conversation  
that goes like this:

A guy is standing by an open fridge.

*He* asks *her*, "Where did you put the butter?"

She says, "In the fridge."

He says, "Nope. I don't see it."

She says, "I put it there it there ten minutes ago."

He says: ``You must have put it somewhere else.  
It's definitely not here!"

At this point she walks over, reaches in and  
quietly pulls out the butter.

Did you know it's a biological fact that men can't  
see as well when they go looking? Women have  
more of a kind of receptor cell in the eyes which  
gives them superior color vision. They also have  
better peripheral vision, seeing a wider range.

But we all have had these times we just can't see,  
but then we do.

Sometimes our not seeing has to do with  
relationships. Someone drops hints all over about  
something they are feeling, and we are oblivious.  
This person has been trying to tell us something,  
reaching out, wanting us to notice their pain.

All along the signs were there,  
and we couldn't see them.

Or we get so distracted and pre-occupied that we  
miss seeing what would be obvious, if we would

slow down and look, if we would put down the cell phone or turn away from the online screen.

And I'm thinking about this past week, with headlines about pipe bombs and a horrific attack on a synagogue of worshippers. I think hatred grows out of blindness. Hatred is predicated on an utter inability or unwillingness to see the humanity of a person or a group that is different from us. Hatred is a perverse refusal to see the dignity of every human being. This blindness destroys communities and turns people against one another.

And there are other ways blindness afflicts us. We miss seeing something God is doing. Our eyes can't discern the hand of God moving right under our noses, so to speak. God's about to do something miraculous, but we yawn. We don't pay attention.

Which brings me to our Gospel reading. It is, first of all, a story of a healing.

It's a simple but miraculous encounter.

In the Middle East, it would be hard to go far along any road and not see a blind man sitting along the edge of the road begging.

Blindness was caused partly by infections of the eye and partly by the constant glare of the sun.

You would see people with flies settling on their matter-encrusted eyes. Naturally this meant the infection got carried far and wide, and blindness was common.

And we see Bartimaeus crying out for help. Along the road leading out of Jericho where he sat, there would have been a crowd of people. Many of them were temple priests, people you would think would be trained to be caring and attentive.

But in Jerusalem some fifteen miles away all the priests were needed, thousands of them, to minister at the altar, because Passover was just around the liturgical corner.

They might have felt hurried, harried, even, wanting to keep going. Gruff and uncaring, they don't have eyes for a needy person,

But then here's Bartimaeus, calling out. Yelling, even. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me", he calls. He creates a stir.

Those walking along with Jesus, his followers, got impatient, annoyed. But nothing discourages blind Bartimaeus from catching the attention of Jesus.

Jesus noticed him amid the crowd of commuters and pilgrims.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks. I'm sure he asked it with gentleness and urgency.

A question not only for Bartimaeus, but maybe for all of us.

He had asked the same question of two of his disciples in last week's reading, by the way. They had asked for a place of honor and status when he returned in glory. Bartimaeus says,

"I want to see."

That's my request sometimes,  
when I realize my blindness.

It's no accident that more than any other healing  
miracle in the Gospel series, Jesus heals the blind.

Two blind men in Galilee, a blind man who  
couldn't talk in Capernaum,  
a blind man in Bethsaida,  
and one more in Jerusalem following  
his cleansing the temple.

And here, Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus, interestingly,  
is given a name in this story. Mark rarely names  
of the person healed in his accounts, but now we  
hear Bartimaeus' name. We can almost imagine  
his face in the crowd.

He was a real person. I believe they were all real  
healings, true accounts of the restoration of  
physical sight.

But the stories of the healing of blindness  
also tell us how God opens and enlightens the  
eyes of our hearts.

For we read that Bartimaeus not only regained his sight, he also followed Jesus on the way.

There was a miracle on another level—a miracle in Bartimaeus. Not just in his body but in his soul.

He had eyes now, I believe, for Jesus. And this can give us hope. His restored sight made him eager to follow.

And Mark has done something fascinating in telling this story.

In these three chapters we've taken our readings from over the last few weeks, Jesus tells his disciples three times that he would suffer and die, and they would suffer.

But it's like they don't hear it each time. They can't see how it could happen, that's how deep their blindness.

But that whole section of three chapters was launched first by Jesus healing

another blind person. Then we get today's story about Bartimaeus at the end of those conversations about suffering.

So a blind person gets healed before and after the portrayal of the disciples not seeing.

It's as though Mark wants to bracket the disciples' denseness and dimness and dull vision with two miracles of sight being restored.

So take heart: there's hope for our spiritual obtuseness, hope for our near-sightedness of the soul. Hope for when we brush past people, too busy to notice their pain. Hope when we miss signs of God's moving and instead insist on being grumpy and angsty.

Hope for when we go through stretches where we stop seeing. Perhaps we stop looking.

But it's different when we believe that God inhabits each day, when we believe God can do the miraculous. When we watch for it.

During this stewardship season I think of a  
fascinating research study.

People who registered high on a scale of gratitude  
were found to be more generous. These grateful  
people saw the abundance of God's goodness to  
them, and they measurably,  
markedly shared more with others.

Count your blessings—notice the gifts in your  
life—*see them*, and you are less likely to worry  
when you calculate your checkbook or are faced  
with a plea or a need.

For gratitude and anxiety don't live easily  
together. Gratefulness expands and pushes worry  
to the edges of our hearts. Realize all that God has  
given you, and it's harder to be hard-hearted,  
harder to keep it to yourself.

Novelist Marcel Proust once said, "The real  
voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new  
landscapes but in having new eyes." That voyage

of discovery means opening our eyes where we  
are, to what's already there.

I think of a time I needed new eyes, in a way.  
For I went some while without knowing how  
nearsighted I was. I think my teachers figured it  
out when I couldn't read handwriting  
on the blackboard in my fifth-grade class.

On the balmy California morning my parents  
drove me home after we had picked the glasses up  
at the eye doctor's office, my new lenses not only  
made things sharper, they caused things to appear  
I had never seen before. From what had been only  
a roadside blur emerged words on a sign.

What before had been only a distant brown  
smudge came into view as rock formations in the  
craggy hills surrounding our valley.

Squinting my eyes or staring harder hadn't made  
any difference. Something had to make me able to  
see. Something outside of me reoriented my sight.

I needed the healing powers of an optometrist, as our souls need the healing of the Great Physician.

Finding our spiritual sight again takes Jesus' healing help. Which means we ask God for vision to see. One thing you have to say about Bartimaeus is he will not be content with his diseased, clouded eyes.

He asks for mercy. He keeps asking for divine help. Can we see ourselves like him, calling through the commotion and crowdedness of life to Jesus? And knowing that we are so valued that we are not just a face in the crowd to Jesus?

In the midst of discouragement or prejudice or boredom or our busyness, we pray, like Bartimaeus, *Lord, let me see*. We say, after the darkness of this past week, *I need your help*. *I want to catch sight again of hopeful glimpses*.

And when we pray that way,

we say it to a God who acts in miraculous ways.  
A God who can heal our blindness, too, and help  
us see his help that is surely, *surely* on the way.