

“Mercy for Blindness”

Mark 10:46-52 & 2 Corinthians 5:7

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Prayer for Understanding Gracious God, we praise you for the grace of your love and for your sovereign care of us throughout all our lives. We dare to pray that as your word is read and proclaimed that we might see afresh the kind of lives you would have us live and the kind of world you would have us build, to your glory. Amen.

God is eager to give you sight for your blindness. Spiritual blindness is the inability to perceive, comprehend, and integrate the grace of God into our life. Without spiritual sight we lack abundant life. The gospel of Thomas states, “When you know yourself, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are a child of the living God. But if you do not know yourself, then you live in poverty and you are poverty.” Spiritual blindness, not living as a beloved child of God, not freely receiving and sharing joy, love, and grace, makes one a beggar. Spiritual blindness is the refusal to let God’s love and goodness and holiness fill the hole in our heart making one a beggar. As a beggar we search and try, search and try again and again to fill the hole in our heart, to complete ourselves, to find abundant life. Only God perfectly fills the hole in our heart. Our spiritual blindness abandons us to begging along the road.

Listen to Jesus giving spiritual sight to a blind beggar along the road. **Mark 10:46-52 NLT “Then they reached Jericho, and as Jesus and his disciples left town, a large crowd followed him. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus) was sitting beside the road. When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus of Nazareth was nearby, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” “Be quiet!” many of the people yelled at him. But he only shouted louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” When Jesus heard him, he stopped and said, “Tell him to come here.” So, they called the blind man. “Cheer up,” they said. “Come on, he’s calling you!” Bartimaeus threw aside his coat, jumped up, and came to Jesus. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked. “My teacher,” the blind man said, “I want to see!” And Jesus said to him, “Go, for your faith has healed you.” Instantly the man could see, and he followed Jesus down the road.”**

The road leads to Jerusalem the place where the revelation of God’s grace will soon take place. Jesus invites us to journey on this road to see God’s love in action through his teachings, healings and mending of relationships, through his death and resurrection.

As spiritually blind beggars we cry out to Jesus, Son of David, because Jerusalem is the city of David where God’s covenant of unconditional love is visible for all to see. Grace heals our blindness. On the road there are obstacles to overcome. People annoyed by our begging for grace, our quest to gain sight through love. Some people journey with us. Others tell us to stop because our quest for grace offends their blind ways.

Everyone who begs for spiritual sight is heard by God, the clear sighted one. God gives us sight that enables us to throw off our burdens enabling us to jump up, to soar on the unforced rhythms of grace. Seeing a new facet of grace fills one with wonder. Jesus instructs us to go further down the road of sight, of self-awareness, of God’s infinite wisdom, peace, joy, love, and grace. We are invited to journey into grandeur sight, to let go of all that diminishes life and let come all that enhances life, to become more and more love, to become complete. See, **2 Corinthians 5:7 “Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”**

If you have ever wondered about your purpose, longed for something more, or lamented your current situation then you are begging for spiritual sight. God is eager to give you sight. In Jesus, seeker and sought meet. Often our sight is slowly restored, it takes time to savor the grace we receive, to let grace transform us, to journey into sharing grace. Jesus tells us to go on a passionate quest for deeper revelation. There will always be more love, more joy, more peace, more grace for us to see.

The blind beggar pleaded have mercy on me. He sees that Jesus comes with mercy that is overflowing with compassion, forgiveness, and resurrection. He recognizes his own blindness, his need for mercy. He does not debate his own goodness, his works, or the unfairness of life. He simply begs for mercy, to see more and more of God’s grace, to see how his life will be transformed, redeemed, resurrected, completed, and perfected, to see the glory of the cosmos in the fullness of God’s goodness.

Begging for mercy for our blindness clears the cataracts. Being aware of what makes you blind enables you to change, to turn to what gives you sight, this is repentance. Repent and see the good news.

For example, I have come to see how my drive to complete a home improvement project blinds me. When I fall behind schedule, or I encounter the unexpected or when things go wrong, I get grumpy, demanding, and blameful. In this state I am not a loving person. I hurt those around me making me even more miserable. My self-awareness enables me to see different ways of working to avoid my blindness. I change my expectations to expecting the unexpected. I allow more time for the project. I take a break when I get frustrated. I try not to speak when I get frustrated. I go over the entire project with Leslie in advance when I am well-rested and in a good mood. Before the project, I beg God to help me not be overwhelmed, to not fall into my old blind ways. I imagine myself doing the project in a joyful, loving caring manner.

Over the years I have formed a long list of triggers that make me blind, that is irritable, fearful, blaming, angry. I have come to see ways to overcome my blindness. I am becoming more self-aware and more aware of God's grace.

We tend to do things the way we have done them before or the way our family has done them. The more stress we are under the more likely we are to impulsively do previous behavior and modeled behavior. One of the tasks I give couples who are preparing for their wedding is to agree upon three things each of their parents did in their relationship that they want to do in their relationship. And agree upon three things each of their parents did in their relationship that they do not want to do in their relationship. I encourage them to write these agreed upon behaviors done and give each other permission to immediately name the behavior when it arises.

Examine your life daily. Reflect on what was the low point of your day? Did you do anything to contribute to that low point? Are there ways you can avoid that sort of low point in the future? What was the high point of your day? Did you do anything to contribute to that high point? Are there ways you can facilitate more high points in the future?

A few times a year I write a rule of life. I strive to see what is going on inside of me, to see what is happening in my life, and to see what God is doing. I begin by brainstorming a list of goodness, love, and joy in my life. I give thanks for these. I celebrate these. Next, I make a quick list of my mistakes, regrets, frustrations, moments when I failed to give love and moments when I failed to receive love. I strive to hand these over to God. Next, I look for patterns and precursors. I name ways I can avoid the unloving moments. I name ways I can create more loving moments. Finally, I make a rule of life to be a more loving person. This way of seeing works well for me because I am an analytical person. You may be a mystical person so your way of seeing will be different. Each of us sees in unique ways.

Spiritual sight, liminal space, the threshold of abundant life, happens when we beg, when we enter a state of receptivity, when our senses expect God to be revealed. God gives us sight, self-awareness, grace awareness, God awareness, which washes over us, cleanses us, transforms us. Spiritual sight sees our true self, sees the good we are doing, sees the good we are capable of doing, sees oneself united with all people in community, sees the coming glory of God. Spiritual sight is seeing God's kingdom and praying thy kingdom come.

Frederick Buechner wrote, "Pilate asks his famous question, "What is truth?" and Jesus answers him with a silence that is overwhelming in its eloquence. In case there should be any question as to what that silence meant, on another occasion Jesus put it into words for his disciple Thomas. "I," he said, "I am the truth. Jesus did not say that religion was the truth, or that his own teachings were the truth, or that what people taught about him was the truth, or that the Bible was the truth, or the church, or any system of ethics or theological doctrine. There are individual truths in all of them, we hope and believe, but individual truths were not what Pilate was after, or what you and I are after either, unless I miss my guess. Truths about this or that are a dime a dozen, including religious truths. THE truth is what Pilate is after: the truth about who we are and who God is, the truth about life, the truth about death, the truth about truth itself. That is the truth we are all of us after. It is a truth that can never be put into words because no words can contain it. It is a truth that can never be caught in any doctrine or creed including our own because it will never stay still long enough but is always moving and shifting like air. It is a truth that is always beckoning us in different ways and coming at us from different directions. And I think that is precisely why whenever Jesus tries to put that ultimate and inexpressible truth into words (instead of into silence as he did with Pilate), the form of words he uses is a form that itself moves and shifts and beckons us in different ways and comes at us from different directions. That is to say he tells stories." Spiritual sight gives us glimpses of the truth.

Richard Rohr wrote, "Humanity has three different sets of eyes, each building on the previous one. The first eye is the eye of the flesh (thought or sight), the second is the eye of reason (meditation or reflection), and the third is the intuitive eye of true understanding (contemplation). I describe this third eye as knowing something simply by being calmly present to it (no processing needed!). "Third eye" thinking is beyond dualistic vision. The loss of the "third eye" is at the basis of much of the shortsightedness and religious crises of the Western world. Lacking such

wisdom, it is hard for churches, governments, and leaders to move beyond ego, the desire for control, and public posturing. Everything divides into dualistic oppositions like liberal vs. conservative, with vested interests pulling against one another. Truth is no longer possible at this level of conversation. Even theology becomes more a quest for power than a search for God and Mystery. One wonders how far spiritual and political leaders can genuinely lead us without some degree of contemplative seeing and action. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that “us-and-them” seeing, and the dualistic thinking that results, is the foundation of almost all discontent and violence in the world.”

I read about a man who studied the story of the healing of the blind man in the Gospel, and the more he studied it, the more he began to catch an uncomfortable glimpse of his own blindness, of how he was neglecting his wife and his children because he had his eye on getting ahead and making a lot of money. And so, like Bartimaeus, he prayed for mercy to cure his blindness and to illumine his path to a more balanced and whole life. “Let me see,” he prayed, and miraculously God answered his prayer.

Pastor Judith Watt said, “I want to stay clear-sighted—to the beauty of the world, to simple goodness, and also to the pain of the world. And it is not easy to stay clear sighted. Bartimaeus has reminded me that we are all blind beggars in some way or another. Lost in a crowd, sitting by the roadside, wondering about our value, overloaded with worries and concerns, beaten down by disappointments, filled with all sorts of questions about our futures, about pain and evil in the world and in our lives. We want to see the way clearly to God and know that God loves us. We want to know that God still cares for this world. We want to believe that somehow, amidst all the pain, God truly is sovereign. Bartimaeus shows me that it is OK to cry out to Jesus. And he reminds me that when I do, Jesus hears and calls me to him. Blind beggars all of us, in some way or another. That is a good thing to remember, because being a disciple requires humility, requires a continual acknowledgment that we are dependent. I want to be that kind of blind beggar, so that when people look at me, they might see someone who relishes beauty and trusts goodness still, despite all of the pain I see or the pain I have experienced. I want to be like Bartimaeus, so that when people look at me, they see a person who is still alert to the injustice and pain in the world, too. And I want to be that kind of beggar who, when Jesus calls me to come and tell him what I need, will be able to throw off my cloak of pride and independence, will spring up again and go to Jesus and say, “Please, Lord, allow me to see.” And then maybe like Bartimaeus I will be able to follow, eyes wide open in astonishment to the beauty and goodness of this world, and also eyes wide open and heartbroken open to the pain of this world too. May it be so for me and for you.”

The account of Jesus giving sight to Bartimaeus comes at the end of a long section in the Gospel of Mark in which Jesus is doing a fair amount of teaching, directed at his disciples. Over and over again there is a lesson Jesus imparts, and over and over again his disciples don’t get it. They try to keep little children away from him; they bicker over who might be first and who might be last; they want to hold onto Elijah and Moses and Jesus on top of the mountain, because the awe of that experience was so incredible; they continually get hung up on the rules of the past and repeatedly focus on the wrong details. They have been spiritually blind, over and over again. And then, after all of those stories, there is this story of a blind beggar. He gets who Jesus is, even though he cannot see as the crowds pass. He is spiritually sighted in ways that the other disciples are not. It is another one of those surprises that keep coming up throughout our scriptures. A blind beggar considered absolutely worthless, easily discarded, and dismissed by society, is the one who helps us see more clearly what Jesus wants us to see. Amen