

PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
REFORMATION SUNDAY
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
October 25, 2009
“THE MYTH OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY”
Mark 10:46-52
8:45 A.M. SERVICE

The myth of self-sufficiency infects us all at one time or another. God created us to be relational and dependent on one another, not superior beings who need no help from anyone. We all come to the place where we need to lay aside our stubborn pride and ask for help. Christ invites us to see in him a source of strength, hope, and love.

Blind Bartimaeus was healed, not only because he expressed his need, but because he saw in Jesus someone who was worthy of his trust and his allegiance. We must not be afraid to tell God and trustworthy people about our needs. There is no shame in admitting that you need help or that you are at the end of your rope. Healing for life's deepest hurts never begins until we cry out for help like the blind Bartimaeus.

Some of the most complex realities in the world are things we take for granted. Take seeing, for example. Until we develop a problem with our vision, we give no more thought to seeing than we do to breathing. From birth forward, for most of us, vision is a largely unconscious part of living. It is only when some difficulty occurs that we become mindful of the miracle of sight. As we approach our later years it is not uncommon to develop near- or farsightedness, astigmatism, glaucoma, or cataracts, and we value our sight more than ever. **“Seeing,”** however, is not confined to the physical eyes. The Creator has blessed us with several gifts of sight.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. There he will be hailed as a conquering hero, then betrayed, and then crucified. He comes to Jericho, which is approximately fifteen miles from Jerusalem, and near the Jordan River. You literally ascend from Jericho, which is 800 ft. below sea level, to Jerusalem, which is 3,200 ft. higher, in the Judean highlands. It is Passover, so many pilgrims are

passing through Jericho, preparing for the ascent to the holy city. Jesus pauses long enough to heal a blind beggar. Think of being blind, and suddenly receiving sight! Imagine that the first thing your eyes see is the face of Jesus! With our physical eyes we see things in the three dimensions of physical space: height, width, and depth. The third of these, depth perception, requires the functioning of both eyes. Sight is a miraculous gift!

Jacques Lusseyran lost his eyesight in childhood, yet as a young man he became active in the French resistance against Hitler, and even survived being sent to Buchenwald. Later he wrote a critically acclaimed memoir titled *And There Was Light*. He wrote that when facing blindness at eight he thought he would never “see” again, but he made a magnificent discovery. Lusseyran provides a provocative description of how he “saw” things “inside” himself, things that were external to sighted people. He reports that things like the sun, and other objects, as well as colors, can be “seen” without being spatial, or appearing to be in space. The French child learned that there are dimensions of reality other than spatial dimensions. Hasn’t this been the claim of faith all along?

Jericho is the world’s oldest city. It is located in the deepest rift on the earth’s surface, a short distance from the Dead Sea. It is situated on one of the most-traveled routes to Jerusalem, and in Jesus’ day Jericho’s western entrance (on the Jerusalem side) was an ideal location for a beggar. The blind beggar Jesus healed was named Bartimaeus, which means “son of Timaeus.” He has been described as *“a blind beggar who was a well-known nuisance at the entrance to Jericho.”*

The disciples and a large crowd were traveling with Jesus. When Bartimaeus heard it was Jesus of Nazareth who was passing by, he began to shout, *“Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!”* People all around him told him to be quiet, perhaps because they thought he was only seeking alms. But Bartimaeus was bold and persistent. He was also either insightful or shrewd, because he called Jesus *“son of David.”* “*Son of David*” was one of the popular titles for the long-expected Messiah. Bartimaeus either believed Jesus was the Messiah or he thought it would help him get Jesus’ attention if he called him *“son of David.”* Whichever was the case, this is the first time Jesus accepted being identified as the Messiah without a rebuke or an injunction to silence.

Insight is vastly different from physical sight. Insight involves a deeply intuitive yet accurate understanding of something or someone. Many people may read a particular novel, but a single literary critic may provide unique insight into the author’s point of view or motivation. Most doctors might be able to diagnose a

patient's depressive illness, but one particular doctor may have insight into the cause of a particular patient's illness. Likewise, Jesus' life and teachings are available to almost everyone who cares to learn of him. But you, as an individual person, may have insight into Jesus' deeper meaning for your life and your understanding of God. Among the gifts of the Holy Spirit is discernment, which is insight into the deeper truths and spiritual meanings of our encounters and experiences.

There are some fascinating mysteries about Bartimaeus. To biblical scholars the most obvious mystery is why we are given his name. The blind beggar is mentioned in three of the Gospels, but only Mark tells us his name. A considerable number of unnamed characters find immortality in the Gospels: the rich young ruler, the widow with two copper coins, the Samaritan woman, the thief on the cross, to name only a few. Not knowing their names does not diminish their importance to us. Why are we told the name of Bartimaeus? Let's consider one possibility.

There is a third kind of seeing that bears mention, and may apply to Bartimaeus. It is seeing with ***"the eyes of the heart."*** (Ep 1:18) Insight, for all of its wonder, can be unemotional, even cold and dispassionate. Bartimaeus called Jesus, ***"son of David,"*** but this alone could mean little or nothing. James says ***"even the demons believe, and shudder."*** (2:19) After the beggar had received his sight, Jesus said, ***"Go your way, your faith has made you well."*** Bartimaeus did not go his own way, but followed Jesus up the road to Jerusalem. The eyes of the heart see things that are life-changing. Did Bartimaeus become a permanent disciple, possibly known and remembered by this Gospel writer? Perhaps. Those who have seen Jesus with the eyes of the heart are those who have loved him most dearly and followed him most nearly.

Each of us might consider the possibility that we have a blindness of which we are unaware. We may have too much confidence in our ability to see the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Beneath the surface of outward appearances, however, nearly everyone is hurting in one way or another. Jesus had the sensitivity and patience to wait for a person's need to be revealed, then he had the wisdom to speak the truth in love to everyone he met. We can't be Jesus, but we can learn from him.

If you believe that Jesus can be the source of your strength, hope, and love, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.