

## Was Blind but Now I See

*Jesus and his disciples came to Jericho. As he 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?"*

From the Gospel According to Mark

I was watching a documentary on Netflix that featured the diaries of Leonardo da Vinci. One of the statements really grabbed me because it stated something that Jesus says again and again as almost a warning after many of his teachings.

Da Vinci was speaking about the resistance to his astounding discoveries about science, the human body and other amazing things. He wrote that in terms of learning or accepting new ideas, there are three classes of people; "There are those who simply see and understand and grow, there are those that see and understand after they are shown, and those who simply do not or will not see at all."

I cannot count the times Jesus says, "Let those with eyes to see, see." I was reminded about Jesus' encounter with a blind man named Bartimaeus. Jesus' point was that those of us who have eyes to see do not always grasp the truth that is right in front of us.

Outwardly a Gospel about physical blindness, it is also a story about spiritual blindness. It's one of only two stories in the gospel of Mark that focus on restoring sight to the blind and these healing passages about blindness form parentheses around Jesus' teaching about the demands of discipleship. The point being that we are supposed to learn what it *really* means to *see* Jesus and offers instruction on what it really means to *follow* Jesus.

Mark tells us consistently that those closest to Jesus most often misunderstand who he really is and that it is those on the outside, the outcasts and the wretched, who grasp the true mystery and meaning of what it means to follow Jesus.

Through the story of Bartimaeus, Jesus calls us to hear the cries of those on the margins and to see the world and those with whom we share it with new eyes and a new vision. Mark's Gospel continually reminds us that those of us on the "inside" don't always get it.

He cautions us that we can become so possessive of God's grace and mercy that we start to think it is something we can give or withhold at our own discretion. The world is full of "good Christian folks" who are happy to tell us who is worthy of God's love and who is not.

Jesus' disciples in the passage above are caught up in the importance of what they perceive their place to be. But it is, in fact, Bartimaeus, this blind beggar, whom the crowd wishes to silence, who sees Jesus most clearly of all.

It is easy to feel that we would never be like the disciples, but there are places in all of our lives where we are blind to the ways we are possessive of what God seeks to give away for free. The first step in true discipleship is having the honesty to see ourselves clearly and to be courageous in throwing off everything that seeks to keep us blind to the world as God sees it.

It can be hard to move from where we are to where God hopes we will go. That's the reality of a faith-full life. Sometimes, when we struggle with new insight, we might be resisting God's call to new life and new understanding. But every day God is calling us to see the world anew through God's eyes.

That is why we are challenged when God pushes over sacred icons in our lives and opens up places of uncertainty, places where what we think we knew is challenged or no longer rings true. The disciples struggle with this constantly as do we. Jesus tells the story again and again that following him closely will change us and our eyes *will be* opened to new truths and new understanding. But here is the hard part: when we allow God's transformative power into our lives, the new demands we encounter can feel pretty overwhelming.

In the end, if we claim the courage and faith of Bartimaeus, we can become a champion of God's compassion and mercy for all. It will demand we learn new things, expand our understanding of how God works in the world. This can be a whole lot more demanding than just sticking with what we believe and remain unchanging, but Jesus promises that it's worth the risk.

Jesus asks us to grow. He asks us, "What do you want me to do for you?" He calls us from the roadside if we have become outcast and shamed by others. *And* with that very same compassion, he calls us to be healed of the self-imposed blindness of fearing new revelation or our place of position.

He calls us *all* to follow him and he teaches us time and again that God's grace flows freely for all. There is indeed more than one way to be blind, but God in Christ offers healing for all of them.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+