

Mark 10:46-52

The Blind See

In the ordinary sense, blindness is a disability that has very real affects on a person's life, it is hard to imagine all the different ways; simple things like checking oneself in the mirror to make sure everything is in place and being able to distinguish between night and day become difficult.

In the bible, blindness is a metaphor for understanding. To be able to see means to "get it," to comprehend, to understand. Even in ordinary discourse, we will sometimes say, "Oh, I see . . ." when something we failed to understand is made known. In such cases we say that the lights have come on and we can see.

In John's gospel Jesus himself is referred to as the "light of the world" and in Matthew's gospel in the Sermon on the Mount it is the people, the church that is not only the Salt of the Earth, but the Light of the World also. "Let your light shine." Help people see and understand about God and about Jesus.

But here in Mark it is the actual healing of a blind man that operates as a metaphor; showing up the failure to understand of the disciples of Jesus and of the crowd, and of the leaders.

Famously, the healing of the blind man in the synoptic story (that is, Matthew, Mark, and Luke) is the last thing that happens before Jesus enters Jerusalem for

that fateful Passover celebration at which he would be executed, largely because of the spiritual blindness of the people, sort of "run amok."

James and John

Jesus had entered Judea by way of Jericho, which was the most common route for devout Jews, enabling them to forego Samaria, the home of their rivals. On the way Jesus was trying unsuccessfully to explain to his disciples that he was going to be killed, but they did not understand; they did not see.

The sons of Zebedee, James and John, are a case in point. After hearing repeatedly that their trip to Jerusalem for the feast would end in tragedy, they are nonetheless blind to its reality. They ask Jesus if he will do for them whatever they want.

The whole idea is commonly preposterous. I say it is common because it is the way many people approach prayer, as if it is a tool to get God to do for us whatever we want. I say it is preposterous because the goal of the spiritual life is clearly the opposite, so that God can get us to do what God wants, which is better.

So Jesus humored them by asking, "What do you want me to do?" They said they wanted to sit on his right and left in his glory, which I am sure they thought would happen at the feast. Had they not heard anything that he had been trying to tell them?

They got their answer. They would drink from his cup. Jesus showered them with pithy sayings; “Whoever wants to be great must be your servant. Whoever wants to be first must be servant of all. The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to *give* his life as a ransom for many.

### Bar Timaeus

By contrast, Bar Timaeus had no pretensions of greatness. For him, and in his place and time, physical blindness had reduced him to beggary. When he heard that Jesus was passing by, he called out for mercy. Most of the entourage wanted to silence him. They thought Jesus had better things to do. But Jesus stopped.

I am sure that it was intentional that Jesus asked him the same question that he had asked James and John. “What do you want me to do for you?”

Strikingly, his answer stands in stark contrast to the answer of the two brothers. “I want to see!” he said. And, of course, the answer of Jesus in reply also stands in contrast, “Go, your faith has healed you.” And that is the last thing that happened before the notorious entry into Jerusalem where Jesus was hailed and lifted up as Messiah.

### Spiritual Blindness

Perhaps there is no better way to describe the difference between spiritual blindness and spiritual sight, between the failure to understand and the ability to understand; than to look at and contrast the requests of James and John and the answer they received, on the one hand, and that of the son of Timaeus on the other:

1 - “Make us the greatest, give us the highest seats of honor in your glory.”

2 - “Have mercy on me, I want to see.”

Perhaps the situations were so different that one cannot reasonably expect their requests to be the same, but the attitudes revealed are worthy of attention nonetheless; it is pride against humility, pretension against transparency, a sense of entitlement against a kind of desperation, “Lord make me great” versus “Lord save me.”

Part of the irony is that the physically blind man is presented as having spiritual understanding while the physically sighted are presented as spiritually blind.

It is also ironic that nothing is told to us about the life of the physically blind man, Bar Timaeus; he was given back his sight and told to go home. James and John, on the other hand, were told that they would indeed

have the eyes of the spirit opened, that they would become servants, live their lives sacrificially, drinking the same cup as Jesus, thus becoming truly great in the truest sense.

We are all blind in the most important ways; blind to God and to each other and to the world. But we too will see. We will drink from the cup. It will not happen quickly, or selfishly, not when we ask for greatness but when we plead for mercy, when by grace we are inwardly changed.

Do not be surprised if it hurts a little, because part of what we see is tragic; the human tragedy of human beings walking around blind to each other. It will be like a fiery furnace which burns off the dross of our inhumanity and superficiality and our cowardice and our lack of compassion and our fear and our malice, which must be let go if we are to see.

It won't be easy or pain-free, but the life on the other side is free and beautiful and magnificent in ways that are beyond our comprehension, beyond our capacity to see.

### Gospel Light

Some of you are not concerned about all these high and lofty sentiments because the daily circumstances of your life are too demanding. Please know that like the blind man whose life was a matter of daily survival

dependent upon the mercy of others, real sight does not come high and lofty, but simple, right at home in the everyday demands of one's life.

And when Jesus passes by, and Jesus is always passing by, there is the possibility of calling out for mercy, That is the best prayer (The Church calls it the "Kyrie" - kyrie eleison).

Lord have mercy on me. Help me, the blind, to see.  
And then the words of blessing;

Go, your faith has made you well."

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