

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 27, 2024

Do you ever wonder what it would be like to be blind? I do but maybe you don't have to wonder. Maybe you are someone who IS blind, or nearly blind, or gradually losing your eyesight little by little. Some people, of course, are blind from birth, we know that. Others are thrust into blindness from injury or the quick onset of some disease. And lots and lots of people, as you know, lose much of their ability to see as they age (for a variety of reasons). That means if I live long enough there is a pretty good chance I will experience some degree of blindness, head down that path familiar to many, the path that leads to the gradual dimming of the world around me. But for now, thank God I, like most of you, am okay.

And honestly, I don't have anyone in my family or close circle of friends who is completely (or nearly) blind. If I did, they could probably give me a good idea what it is like. But since that's not the case, I'll just have to wonder and wait.

Oh, I'm not saying that I will avoid the diminished eyesight that comes with age. That's unlikely. And I'm not saying that the medical community will somehow be able to eradicate all blindness in the near future. That seems even more unlikely. No, the reason I don't have to wonder what it's like to be blind is because I already am. And I'm not sure I'm that aware of it, or that convinced. Yet my blindness remains.

I'm often blind to the needs of the people around me, so absorbed in my work or distracted by a myriad of things that I can't see the person right in front of me, desperate to be helped.

I'm often blind to injustices in my midst, both the really big ones and the smaller ones I might be contributing to through my own attitudes and choices. I'm often blind to my unhealthy need to be liked or affirmed or appreciated or thanked or exalted.

I'm often blind to my need to be right or "win" every argument. I'm often blind to my tendency to talk before listening, or explain before asking for the thoughts and opinions and ideas of others.

I'm blind to my own selfishness and self-centeredness, my own wants and desires. And I'm blind to my own biases, and prejudices, and unfair judgments.

Put simply, I'm blind to MY profound need to be changed, on the inside, my deep need to be transformed into a more loving, more kind, more compassionate, and more other-centered person.

Yes, most of the time I'm convinced that I see just fine.

“Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.”

We love these “miracle” stories, don't we? We love seeing Jesus do something we could never do. We love seeing him step in and “save the day” for someone or some situation. Way to go Jesus! And the person (or people) he helps in these situations? Well, they're just passive in all of this, just along for the ride, just on the receiving end of Jesus' power and compassion. Way to go Jesus! But is that really what's going on here? Is Bartimaeus just “anybody”, just somebody Jesus needs for what he plans to do? In other words, is he just there to allow Jesus to teach us something important? Or might he (Bartimaeus) be able to teach us something too? I think you know the answer.

The irony, of course, is that Bartimaeus, a blind man, clearly can see in ways that change his life. Despite his blindness, despite the hardships that come along with it, he was able to see through the eyes of faith. See the possibility for a better future. See the right person in whom to put his trust. See the difference Jesus could make in his life. In a certain sense, see his God in this man he had heard about, a man he believed could heal him, help him, make his life better. And it didn't matter if others were trying to stop him. He was laser-focused. We, on the other hand, can see

but are often blind in countless ways. We don't always turn to the right places or things or people for help. We often embrace a kind of hopelessness and cynicism, convinced that the future will always be worse than the past. We let the pressure from the crowds around us keep us from staying the course. And most importantly, we often have a hard time seeing our God all around us; our loving God who comes to us continually through other people and through the situations in which we find ourselves.

Bartimaeus was blind, we all know that, but he saw the important things. We can see, but somehow are often blind to the things that ultimately matter, the grace of God at work, poured into every heart open to it. And so, Bartimaeus is not really a passive bystander. He is you or me or at least the people God hopes we can be, people who see the world through the eyes of faith. And like Bartimaeus, when we see in spiritual ways, when we embrace hope and trust and humility, good things are born. Sometimes those things bless us specifically, as individuals (as it did Bartimaeus), and other times our faith brings about blessings for others and for the world as a whole.

This is the saving power of God at work, not a power that only saves us once our earthly lives have ended, but a power that saves us in this time and place. Bartimaeus was "saved" that day because of his faith and the compassion of God. May his example help each of us to allow Jesus to save us this day from whatever is enslaving us, weighing us down, holding us back, and crushing our spirits.

"Jesus, son of David, have pity on me!"

Maybe that's not just a line from a story long ago. Maybe that should be our prayer each and every day.

