**Do You ‘REALLY’ Want to See Clearly?**

**Luke 18: 35-43; Rev. G. Scott Turnbrook; Northwood United Church; July 31, 2016**

They are out there, can you actually see them? Since its release on July 6th, 30 million players worldwide are trying to see them. Can you see them? Are you following them? Hunting after them? Chasing after them? How many do you have? Do you have any rare ones which you are proud of? What level have you reached? If you haven’t figured out what I am speaking about yet, I’ll fill you in. I’m speaking about the new social phenomena of Pokemon Go. (slide) Pokemon Go is a newly released game that people play on their smart phones as they wander about looking to collect these cute little Pokemon / pocket monsters. What is wonderful is you can’t stay at home on the couch and play the game. You need to physically get up and go to different locations. It’s kind of like an electronic scavenger hunt, except you can’t see the treasure you are hunting for. You must look on the screen of your phone in order to actually see what the naked eye does not reveal ~ a live pokemon. You throw your poke ball and you capture a pokemon for your collection. The game can get quite involved as people reach higher and higher levels and pride themselves on their growing collection. But make no mistake, you cannot see these pokemon with the naked eye ~ in fact, there are three on Northwood’s property. In order to see the pokemon, you must use the game, look at your phone and then, and only then, will you be able to see what lies in front of you.

Now long before Pokemon Go and people using their smart phones to see these adorable little pocket monsters, there existed many stories of people wanting to see. The first gospel written ~ the Gospel of Mark, records one instance of the healing of a blind man, the last gospel ~ John records another one, Matthew records two and Luke records the one we consider this morning that we find in the 18th chapter. It begins giving geographical information: “as he approached Jericho”. Jesus is approaching Jericho. And if you know your geography, we know that he is getting very close to Jerusalem ~ to the place where his identity and purpose will be fully revealed; where he will model servant ministry ~ washing the feet of his friends; making an upper room meal sacred ~ promising them bread for their journey and wine of the everlasting covenant of God. It is the place where he will be tried and convicted by the religious authorities of the day for the heresy of proclaiming that God’s love extends beyond all boundaries. It is the place where he will die a horrible death, yet rise proclaiming God’s reign over the powers of this world, thus proclaiming the reign of God’s kingdom. Jesus is on his way to revealing who he really is!

In particular, what Jesus reveals about his identity in this passage is that he has come to give people new vision: the vision of the Kingdom of God. We, of course, remember that he said he would do this way back at the beginning of his ministry in the fourth chapter of Luke. You remember immediately after his 40 days of temptation in the wilderness, he returns, enters the synagogue…he unrolls the scroll and reads from the scroll of Isaiah: ‘*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down*. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry he told everyone what he was going to accomplish ~ “recovery of sight to the blind”. And in this morning’s passage, 14 chapters later, he accomplishes it. He heals the blind beggar.

The interaction of the blind beggar with Jesus is an interesting one, and it operates on many levels. What I find fascinating is that the supposedly blind man can actually see in ways that the disciples cannot. There are many types of blindness aren’t there? While he can’t physically see what is happening, he somehow knows that the crowd passing is a significant event, and it is one which he can participate in. So, he inquires “what is happening?” “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by”. “Jesus of Nazareth have mercy on me” he cries out. And again, this time with a different title: “Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me”. Ironically, the crowds (who supposedly had vision) also had a form of blindness. The text says they “sternly ordered the blind man to be quiet”. This is an interesting part of the text, I think, because the Greek verb here ~ “timao” ~ where they sternly ordered the blind beggar to be quiet, is the very same verb used when they attempted to prevent the little children from being brought to Jesus. Timao is the action of prohibiting the powerless, marginalized persons from coming forth. They blindly attempted to stop the children from coming forth to Jesus; and here they blindly attempt to stop the blind beggar from receiving Jesus’ healing. So, to be clear, there is blindness present in both parties: the blind beggar is physically blind and the crowds following Jesus are spiritually blind ~ not understanding Jesus’ mission of ‘*releasing the captives, offering recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favour.’*

In the end, vision is restored ~ both the vision of the blind beggar and the vision of the crowds ~ and God is praised by both parties. The passage concludes with the blind beggar regaining his sight and his response is to follow Jesus and glorify God. The people have a similar reaction, it says (and I think this is significant), that “when they saw it” (that is…the healing of the blind beggar), that they “praised God”.

Listening to this passage, you may have been thinking of one of the gospel parallel stories that names the blind beggar as “Bartimeus” ~ the version that we read in Mark. Luke chose not to give the man a name. He is just named the “blind beggar”. Is this to show his absolute social insignificance? Does it further highlight how Jesus would stop the parade on the way to Jerusalem and heal this man, so socially insignificant that he is not given the dignity of being given a name? Perhaps. Another thought is that his lack of being given a name invites us to reflect our living, our culture, our social situation into this passage. For in the nameless blind man, perhaps we find ourselves.

I wonder what kind of blindness afflicts us in the world today? Sometimes the blindness is internal; sometimes the blindness is communal. I will never forget doing a ‘theme conversation’ years ago in a former church with a lady who is visually impaired. Marilyn is an amazing lady whose vocation was teaching people to use technology to assist them with their visual impairment. She uses a gps to guide her from the bus and skytrain. She has a special reader that helps her read a restaurant menu. The technology today is amazing. So, when we were focusing on the healing of a blind man, I asked Marilyn to show the children how the technology she uses allows her to ‘see’. We welcomed the children at the front as we gathered and I introduced Marilyn and then I did something I shouldn’t ~ as Marilyn was setting some of her things down I tried to help her by moving an item closer for her so she could reach it. She jokingly said to me and the congregation ~ ‘you sighted people…always messing us blind people up!’ And as Marilyn taught about the technology that allowed her to see, I realized that there are so many more ways to see ~ than the ways most of us do. I see with my eyes. She ‘sees’ with technology, she ‘sees’ with her ears ~ as she makes sense of her surroundings, she even ‘sees’ based on how she carefully places items down on the floor ~ assuming they will be there when she needs them.

And there are so many other ways to see, aren’t there? What about seeing with your heart? Seeing the needs of others in the community? I so love the mission statement here at Northwood ~ “embracing the community with the love of Christ” I have really enjoyed visiting Northwood’s Thrift store and I have been so moved to have people trust me by sharing some of the conversations that have occurred there. There have been some deeply compassionate and prayerful conversations over the cash register. This kind of sharing and caring is an example of seeing with the heart. Some of you are aware that while I am here at Northwood as your half-time minister, I spend the other half of my time at First United Church in the Downtown Eastside. Much of my work there is simply a ‘listening ministry’ where people dealing with issues of poverty, homelessness, addiction, and abuse simply want to be heard…sometimes they want someone to pray with them…sometimes they want someone to just to ‘be’ with them…But always they want someone to see the pain they are in and be acknowledged as a child of God. They want someone to see with their heart. And that is what I try to do.

As we all need, there is much vision restoration that needs to be done. There is so much need to be seen in the world today. In less than one hour the Vancouver Pride Parade will be marching in the downtown of Vancouver. An interesting article in yesterday’s Vancouver Sun reported the findings from a Telus workplace survey: 1/3 of people surveyed did not believe their workplace was a safe and inclusive environment for gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual people. That number jumps to 50% for transgendered people. It appears we still need much work in our restoration of vision. And as people march and wave flags, and the diversity of Vancouver is celebrated, we are starkly reminded that many cannot simply be themselves at work.

When I look at this passage, I think the real challenge for us is found in the middle section. Jesus says: “what do you want me to do for you?” and the blind man says “Lord, let me see again”. How would you respond to this question from Jesus? If Jesus asked “Scott, what do you want me to do for you?” Would you have the courage to ask for vision? Would you REALLY WANT to see with the eyes of your heart? Would you TRULY WANT to see with the needs around you? Would you TRULY WANT to see and realize your calling? Would you TRULY WANT to see the calling of your church? And so, perhaps, that is the 2,000 year old calling echoing through this passage to us today. “David, Scott, Pam, Elizabeth…what do you want me to do for you?” The question is … Do we REALLY want to see clearly?

Amen.