A.M.D.G. 22nd Sunday After Pentecost - B Text: Mark 10: 46 - 52

October 25th, 2015

**Mark 10** ….. They 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?’ The blind man said to him, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’  Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

**Through The Eyes Of The Heart**

Two men set out on a journey together. They took a donkey to carry their packs, a torch to light their way at night, and a rooster, who was a friend of the donkey. The rooster sat on the donkeys head during the entire journey. One of the men was deeply religious. The second was a skeptic. On the journey, they frequently spoke about God. *In all things, God is good*, said the first companion. “*We will see if your opinion bears out on the trip*, said the second.

Shortly before dusk, the two men arrived in a small village, where they sought a place to sleep. Despite their frequent requests, no one offered them a nights lodging. Reluctantly, they traveled a mile outside of town, where they decided to bed down for the night. *I thought you said that God is good*, the skeptic said sarcastically. *God has decided that this is the best place for us to sleep tonight*, replied his friend.

They fixed their beds beneath a large tree, just off the main road that led to the village - tethering the donkey about 30 yards away. Just as they were about to light the torch, they heard a horrible noise. A lion had killed the donkey and carried it off to eat it away from the two men. Quickly, the companions climbed the tree to stay away from danger. *You still say that God is good?* The skeptic asked with anger. *If the lion hadnt eaten the donkey, he would have attacked us. God is good,* his companion declared.

Moments later, a cry from the rooster sent them further up the tree. From this new vantage point, they saw a wildcat carrying off the rooster in its teeth. Before the skeptic could say a word, the man of faith declared, *The cry of the rooster has once again saved us. God is good.*

A few minutes later, a strong wind arose and blew out the torch - the only comfort of the men in the black night. Again the skeptic taunted his companion, *It appears that the goodness of God is working overtime this evening*, he said. This time, the believer was silent.

The next morning, the two men walked back into the village for food. They soon discovered that a large band of outlaws had swept into the town the previous night and robbed the entire village of all its possessions.

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With this news, the man of faith turned to his friend, *Finally, it has become clear*, he cried. *Had we been given a room in the village last night, we would have been robbed along with all of the villagers. If the wind had not blown out our torch, the bandits who traveled the road near the place where we slept would have discovered us, and taken all our goods. It is clear, that in all things, God is good.*

Faith often times means trusting that God is at work in our lives - even when it is hard to see that in the circumstances around us. Think about the times in your life when everything around you seemed dark and heavy - times of sorrow and grief over the death or illness of a loved one, troublesome times with your children, times of broken relationships , or times of despair and worry or depression over something in your life that has or has not happened. It is at those times that we often feel that God is no where to be found - that somehow, we have been abandoned or punished and left to deal alone in the dark as best we can, with what life has thrown at us. When the circumstances around us are dark, it takes courage to hold fast in trust that God will see us through - to recognize God at work in the midst of the darkness - in the people and situations we encounter.

Our Gospel lesson today speaks about a man who was *born* into darkness - one who spent his days as a blind beggar, sitting by the roadside. Until one day, Jesus passed by - and despite his physical handicap, the man was able to somehow recognize the presence of God in his midst. After great persistence, he is brought to Jesus - who asks him what seems to be a rather strange question: *What do you want me to do for you?* Now there were a lot of possibilities for Bartimaeus. He could have said, *Lord, make people more generous toward me*, or *Lord, Id like enough money not to have to come out here to beg*, or *Lord, let me see just a bit so that it makes my begging a little easier.* Instead, Bartimaeus chooses the responsibility of sight. He chooses to be given the opportunity to do something with his life. Mark tells us that immediately, Bartimaeus got up and followed Jesus. Who knows where that journey took him? I often wonder if he ever wished for the days when he could not see - and therefore, was not responsible in the same way he was after receiving his sight.

Annie Dillard, in her book **Pilgrim At Tinker Creek**, quotes an article which describes the first people of the world who, blind from birth, underwent successful cataract surgery. You can imagine the wonder with which, for the first time in their life, they saw a climbing rose, a birch tree, a sunset. One girl was so stunned by her first glimpse of the radiance of the world that she kept her eyes shut for 2 weeks. When she finally opened her eyes again, she could only say, over and over, *O God! How beautiful!*

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But not everything was beautiful for these patients. The world turned out to be bigger and more complex than they expected. Unable to judge distances, they reached for things a mile away and cracked their shins on furniture they perceived only as patches of colour. Seeing themselves for the first time in the mirror made some of them unhappy and self-conscious. Others wouldnt go outside. The father of one young woman wrote her surgeon that his daughter had taken to shutting her eyes when she walked around the house and seemed happier pretending to be blind again.

When Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wanted, it seems fairly straight forward and easy. He wants his sight. But receiving his sight would not necessarily have been an easy transition to make. Sighted - he would have been introduced to a newer and perhaps, in certain ways - an even more difficult life. What employer would hire him when his only recent work experience consisted of begging for spare change? What work could he do? Was his back up to hard labour any more? His muscles? He could no longer be dependent on others in the same way - but would need to take responsibility for his own life. Having our eyes opened is not always easy - either physically or spiritually. Elizabeth Barrett Browning once wrote:

*Earths crammed with heaven,*

*And every common bush afire with God.*

*But only he who sees takes off his shoes;*

*The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.*

It’s not that we *mean* to be so blind - only that we are, at times, so caught up in the grip of life and our own circumstances that we dont see that *earths crammed with heaven*. Perhaps we become so narrowly focussed on our jobs that we no longer really see the people and relationships who give our lives meaning. Perhaps we become so busy that we race through our days without really seeing the beauty in a rainbow after the rain, or the blazing red of an autumn tree and the playful antics of the squirrels in our yard. Or perhaps we have become so used to seeing people looking for a handout or up, that we no longer notice them.

*Earths crammed with heaven,*

*And every common bush afire with God.*

*But only he who sees takes off his shoes;*

*The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.*

And in terms of our faith - when the eyes of our hearts and minds have been opened to the point where our faith is more than just going to church - we are forced to evaluate our entire lives in the light of our understanding of the gospel. When we see injustice, we are called not only to name it - but to try to do something about it.

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Here at West Point Grey United – we see things like reaching out to our neighbours in the WPG community through programs like Janis’ Kitchen and Friday.com and ESL; or TLC – which reaches out to seniors in the area; or providing 3,000 pairs of socks annual to First United Mission, or sponsoring refugees, - as seeing and serving Christ in our midst.

If, like Bartimaeus, in response to Gods question, *What do you want me to do for you?* - we say that we want the ability to ***see*** - then we must be prepared for the responsibility that goes with that gift - to be the hands and feet of God to a needy world. And that may take us down some bumpy roads, to places weve never been before and might not have chosen - and to some people who challenge our patience, our biases and our understanding. But - like the girl born with cataracts - stunned by her first glimpse of the world - when we have the courage to see again, as if for the first time - we are blessed by how much richer the world seems through the eyes of the heart. And how beautiful the presence of God is - even in the most shadowed of places.

*What do you want me to do for you?* asks Jesus.

And our answer - if we have the courage of Bartimaeus? *Lord, help us to see - as if for the first time. Help us to see the value and primacy of our relationships. Help us to see people -* ***really see them*** *- those whom we love as well as the obnoxious, the disadvantaged, the challenging. Help us to see ourselves - the beauty inherent in each one of us, as well as the spiritual needs we often overlook. And help us to see much more readily the signs of your love for us, the co-incidences in life that give hints of your presence - the sacredness that permeates the world around us. Lord, help us to see - not just with our eyes, but with the eyes of our heart.*

Amen - so may it be.