

Blindness is a popular image in scripture. The psalmist tells us:

Psa. 146:8 the LORD opens the eyes of the **blind**.

***The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.***

And Isaiah is fond of using blindness as a metaphor:

***Is. 59:10 We grope like the **blind** along a wall,
groping like those who have no eyes;
we stumble at noon as in the twilight,
among the vigorous as though we were dead.***

But Jesus uses blindness to describe people who may have sight, but clearly have no vision. They have the tools to recognize the Messiah, yet they don't understand. In Matthew he says,

Matt. 23:24 You **blind** guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!

I understand why it is such a popular metaphor in scripture. We still use blindness and the verb "to see" metaphorically. When something is made clear for us, we say, "Oh, I see." How strange must that sound to new English speakers when they hear someone say, "I see" over the phone.

But I have a difficult time approaching these "blindness" texts only metaphorically. Because I know about real blindness. My father went blind when I was a little girl. He had multiple detachments of both of his retinas. He still has some vision, but is legally blind. I may have some ideas about what it must have been like for him, but I can only really say what the experience was like for me.

Things changed. He couldn't work as he used to. So he became "Mr. Mom" and my mom had to go back to work. Many more dads stay home with their children now, but I was the only kid I knew whose dad was home when we got home from school. He wouldn't have chosen that, I don't think. It wasn't what the men of his generation were doing. But it worked well for me. I think I got to know my dad better than a lot of my friends knew their dads. His blindness gave us time to be together. So there was grace in the midst of it.

But it also brought challenges.

In any case, having experienced how blindness affects a person's life makes me a little sensitive when it gets thrown around metaphorically.

"You're so blind!", we might tell someone when they overlook something obvious. But not being able to find your car keys on the kitchen counter is not equal to actually not being able to see what your children look like.

So, I approach this text cautiously. I will speak of blindness metaphorically, but know that I do not lightly use someone else's disability as an object lesson for us.

So, we encounter our biblical blindman on the road. He's begging—an occupation common for people for whom society can find no other employment, and he hears a commotion.

"What's going on?", he asks his neighbors.

"Jesus of Nazareth is coming by", they tell him.

"Son of David, have mercy on me!" he cries out.

And then the paradox of community comes in. The same people who helped him by answering his questions and telling him that Jesus was coming are the same people who now try to quiet him. Because as a community will support an individual, even if only by answering his questions and allowing him to beg on the side of the road, the same community tries to control its image. "Jesus is coming. We want him to see the nice parts of Jericho. We don't want him to know we have beggars. And certainly not beggars who bring politics into the mix!"

Because the blindman didn't just call out Jesus' name. He called out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

He's connecting Jesus to the throne of David, which was both a political threat to Rome and a connection to the Messianic claims and hopes of Israel.

I hope that we, as a community, take note of this piece of the story. Because we, as a community, help individuals. We do what we can when we hear of the needs of individuals. You just helped fill 404 backpacks for kids in this community, after all! And if I mention that the food pantry is low, you fill it up within a week.

But do we also, like the people of Jericho, try to silence people who voice things that make us uncomfortable?

The blindman in our story, and the ones in our lives today, both real and metaphorical, will not be silenced. "Son of David! Have mercy on me!", he yells even more loudly.

The man doesn't have his sight. He doesn't have a job. He doesn't have much. But he has a voice. Don't ever underestimate the power of your voice.

And he knows where to go for help.

"Jesus! Have mercy on me!"

Jesus stops.

"What do you want me to do for you?", he asks.

I love this question.

It reminds us to stop and consider. Jesus is clarifying the issue. "What does mercy mean for you?", Jesus wants to know. Is the man asking for money? Does he want attention? Is he asking forgiveness? Help?

Or, perhaps more likely, Jesus knows what the man wants, but wants to make sure the blind man knows what he wants.

And as people to whom this question is being asked, it calls on us to clarify our own thoughts too.

What do we want Jesus to do for us when he finds us by the side of the road?

I would have to stop and think about it for a while.

But the blindman knows.

Immediately.

"I want to see again."

And this is where the physical healing and the metaphorical healing overlap again.

I do believe Jesus healed people. There are too many stories of his healing for this story to be seen only as a metaphor. But even as I believe in Jesus' power to heal, I can't begin to tell you why this particular blind man was healed while others were not.

But the blindman's response, "I want to see again" is supposed to be our cry as well.

Since most of us are not legally blind, as is my father, this may not be a literal request we're making.

What do we want to see again?

Do we want to see God at work in the world in ways we haven't seen in a while?

Do we want to see restored relationships?

Do we want to see a future with hope?

Do we want to see justice?

Do we want to see truth?

Or, do we want to see our own truths?

I confess that I have plenty of illustrations I could share here this morning about people in our society who are blind. I think we should have a conversation about health care. And I don't expect that everyone would agree with the plans on the table, but when I see people making posters of Obama looking like Hitler, I confess that all I see is their blindness. "How can they not see the truth about the need for affordable health care?!", I want to scream out when I see those 'townhall' pictures. I can find the blindness in politicians and TV personalities. I can find the blindness in people with whom I interact.

But I have a harder time finding my own blindness.

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

"What do you want from me?"

"Lord, let me see again".

Did you notice the "again"?

In this passage, it is a word of hope and promise for me.

It means that the man once had sight and he wants it back. Again.

It means that he once could see and he values what he has lost. Again is a word of hope, because even though he's lost his ability to see, he believes it is within him again to do so.

I had an "again" moment yesterday. The Presbytery met yesterday, for the first time since the meeting in April when we voted on the amendments to the Book of Order. If you recall, I was a little frustrated after that vote. I was, honestly, frustrated with some of my colleagues and was hurt by some of the things they said when we were discussing the amendments. Their blindness was apparent to me, let's just say.

And yesterday, when I walked in to the meeting, those same people greeted me, asked me how my first year has been at Southminster, and genuinely greeted me in friendship and as a colleague. During the meeting, when they raised their hands to speak, I confess that I braced myself for what they might say. But they made insightful and compassionate comments, leading the conversation in good ways. And I realized that I was seeing again.

I don't pretend that our theologies line up on all points, and I still want to work for justice and inclusion in the church, but yesterday I realized I had more colleagues than I was aware of.

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.

This week, after you've asked for mercy, I invite you to prepare for Jesus' question:

"What do you want me to do for you?"

And be prepared to see again.

Amen.

Blindness
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