

A NEW WAY OF SEEING

Mark 10:46-52

October 25, 2009

(Proper 25, Yr. B)

**Lead me, Lord, lead me in thy righteousness
 Make thy way plain before my face.
 For it is thou, Lord, thou, Lord only,
 That makest me dwell in safety.**

I ran into an old friend the other day I hadn't seen in ages. And he asked me if I had time a cup of coffee. So we went down to the coffee shop. And ... he told me he just needed to *talk* to someone because things at home were not good. He and his wife were not seeing eye to eye, he said. In fact, they were hardly speaking to each other, anymore. They were like strangers to each other. And he didn't know what to do. He just didn't see how they could go on much longer.

And he looked at me and said, "I've always admired you and Ann. You always seem to get along so well. And you don't yell at each other, or call each other names. You don't throw dishes and silverware at each other," he said.

How do you do it? And I just mumbled something about being best friends before we started dating, or something like that. But he kept *pressing* me. "Tell me," he said. "What's the secret? What is it that has made such a difference with you two?"

So I told him. It's kind of *embarrassing*, to be honest with you. But I he was desperate. So I told him. "It all goes back to our honeymoon," I said. "Ann had always wanted to see the Grand Canyon when she was a kid, so that's what we did. We went to the *Grand Canyon National Park*. And we went out and looked at it as soon as we got there." (It's big! I had no idea it was that big! Have you ever seen it? Big, big hole in the ground.)

But Ann wasn't satisfied just to stand there and look at the canyon. She wanted to go down *into* the thing. So we drove around till we found a little place not far from the motel where you could rent a pack mule for a day. So we rented a couple of old mules, and picked up some brochures about the trails that lead into the canyon. And we picked out one of the gentler trails and off we went ... into the Grand Canyon.

And said (my old friend), “We started out just fine. I had no idea what I was doing, of course. And I was scared out of mind practically. Because I have this terrible fear of heights, you know. And I’m not all that comfortable with animals that are bigger than me. But Ann grew up on a farm, so I figured she could handle it. And I was right. She did. Because the mule she was riding started to buck a little. And she *handled* it. Believe me. And it was amazing. She just *spoke* to that mule. You should have seen it. She just leaned forward and spoke right into the old mule’s ear in soft, sweet voice. **‘That’s once,’** she said. “And that was it! That big old mule settled right down just like that. It was amazing,” I said. “I was really impressed.”

“But a little farther down the trail her mule started to hug the canyon wall. And it ran her knee right into the rock. And it hurt... But you know what she did? She just patted that old mule on the head and said, in that same quiet voice said, *That’s twice*. And that was it. The mule was as steady as it could be after that.... And I remember thinking, ***I’ve married the Mule Whisperer!*** They could make a movie about her! Beat anything I’d ever seen. I mean, I was just amazed at this woman.”

“But then, a little further down the trail -- when it was getting pretty steep, mind you -- that old mule stumbled on a rock and almost threw Ann off her back. And ... I probably shouldn’t tell you this, but Ann slid down from that mule, reached into her pack, pulled out a big stick (it looked like an axe handle or something), and she whacked that poor mule right between the eyes. Looked like the Babe knocking one out of the park!

And I couldn’t *believe* it. She nearly *killed* the poor thing! Poor old mule was down on its *knees* crying! (Or braying or whatever it is a mule does when it’s in pain.) And I said, “What are you doing!?! You almost killed him! You can’t do that ... it’s not even your mule! Do you want to spend the rest of our honeymoon in jail!?”

And she looked at me with the strangest look on her face -- as if she was in shock. And then she smiled. And in a soft, sweet voice she said, **‘All right, buster. That’s once.’**

Haven’t had a problem since, I told him. Gave me a whole new perspective... I mean, after that I saw our relationship in a different light. A new way of seeing ...

(Portions of that story are not true, of course. Well ... to be honest, hardly *any* of it's true. But, sadly enough, it *could* be. It might as well be, really. And *that's* the truth! ✕

Well, something like that happened at school one day. In one of the second-grade classrooms, the kids were talking about nature -- about the moon and the stars and flowers and trees and rainbows and birds. And a little boy named Tommy said, "We learned about this in Sunday School -- that God made the moon and the stars and the sky and the trees. And God made the world and everything in it, and you and me, and all that we see."

And I don't know why a teacher, *a second-grade teacher*, would ever *do* such a thing. Maybe she was having a bad day. Or maybe she was upset or hurting or just not thinking or feeling or *something*. But for some reason she turned and said, "Tommy, do you see the tree outside?"

"Yes," he said.

And she said, "Tommy, do you see the grass outside?"

"Yes."

"And the flowers?"

"Yes."

And she said, "Tommy, go outside and look up and see if you can see the sky."

"Okay," he said. And he went out and he looked and came inside again. And the teacher said, "Tommy, did you see the sky?"

"Yes," he said.

And the teacher said, "Did you see God?"

"No."

And the teacher said, "Tommy, you didn't see God, because God isn't there. And God isn't there because God isn't real."

And everything got quiet. And the teacher got quiet. And Tommy looked as if his heart had just been broken. And it had. I think it had. And they all sat there in that awful silence. (And then a little girl who was sitting next to Tommy asked the teacher if *she* could ask him some questions, too. And the teacher said, "Yes... If he doesn't

mind.” And the little girl said, “Tommy, do you see the tree outside?”

“Yes,” he said.

“Do you see the grass and the flowers?”

“Yes.” (By this time I think he was getting a little tired of all the questions.)

And the little girl said, “Tommy, did you see the sky?”

“Yes.”

And then the little girl said, “Tommy, do you see the teacher?”

“Yes.”

“Do you see her brain?”

And Tommy said, “No.”

And the little girl said, “Does that mean she doesn’t have one?” ✘

Bartimaeus had never seen *Jesus*. He didn’t see the moon or the stars or the birds or the flowers. He didn’t see a rainbow or a sunset or the face of a child all lit up with joy... or even the face of someone who cared. Bartimaeus didn’t see much of anything, really. Because he was blind. And that’s about all Mark has to say about poor Bartimaeus -- that he was the son of a man named Timaeus. And he was blind. Oh, and Bartimaeus, he says, was a beggar. He had to beg in the streets everyday just to survive.

I remember seeing people do what he did when I was a kid. People sitting on the sidewalks with their hat in their hand. Or maybe they’d have a tin cup or a can. And one or two of them sold pencils there on the street. And there was one man who played a harmonica and an old guitar. They weren’t lazy or senseless, mind you. They were just trying to survive. Just trying to get by the only way they knew how. And I remember feeling sad for them -- that they had to do that -- and wondering what had happened to make things that way.

Oh, and I remember how my grandma would talk to them and make them smile and treat them just the same

as she'd treat anybody -- anybody at all. As if she was honored to meet them.

And that's what Bartimaeus did day after day. He went to the streets and he begged so he could get up and do it again the next day, and the next, and the next... It doesn't seem like much of a life, does it? Having to be led wherever he went. Always depending on other people. For *everything*, nearly. And there are always folks who look at people like Bartimaeus as if they're defective. As if they're something less than all the rest of us. Misfits. Throwaways. Disposable even ... like an injured mule or a wounded deer.

Oh, but Bartimaeus had heard people talking about a man sent from God with a *message* for misfits and *good news* for the poor. You know his name. Bartimaeus heard people talking about Jesus. There were rumors that Jesus had touched a leper and made him clean. That he had made a bent woman straight. And Jesus, they said, healed a paralyzed man and he set people free from the demons that had taken control of their lives. And he raised a little girl from the dead. And he heard rumors that Jesus had opened the eyes of people like him and made them see.

He heard people talking ... But he'd never seen him ... Or had he?

Bartimaeus was blind. His eyesight was gone. And yet, he could see so well. He could see with the same kind of vision that let a little girl in second-grade look up and see an invisible God. He could see with the same kind of eyes that you look through when you know in your heart that Jesus is real -- that Jesus is here in this place when we come together. Jesus called it the vision of the heart. **Blessed are the pure in heart, for ... what was it he said? For they shall see God.**

One day, says Mark, Jesus was there. Bartimaeus was sitting there with his cup in his hand ... and he heard a commotion. It sounded like a crowd of people coming toward him. And someone said, "Look! It's Jesus!" And when Bartimaeus heard that, he started shouting, "Jesus! Jesus!" He kept shouting to him louder and louder, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

People tried to make him stop. "Bartimaeus, be quiet," they said. "We want to hear what he's saying." But he kept shouting louder and louder, "Jesus, Son of David,

have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped. And he said, “Tell him to come here.” And Bartimaeus jumped up and went to Jesus. And Jesus, who could see with deeper eyes, too, said, “What do you want me to do for you?” And Bartimaeus said, “I want to see.” And do you know what Jesus said? He said, **“Be on your way. Your faith has made you well.”** And in that moment, in that encounter, Bartimaeus received his sight. And it was clear that he could see deeply, in more ways than one. For he had opened his eyes, and he followed Jesus in the way that leads to new life -- to life abundant and eternal.

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What if Jesus was here, sitting beside you -- right beside you there in the pew? If it helps, close your eyes and imagine he's there sitting close -- so close you can reach out and touch him. And even though you don't say anything, he can hear you. He can hear the voice in your heart, calling to him louder and louder. “Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me!” ✠ And he turns to you and says,

“What is it that you want me to do for you? What is it you long for? What do you need to be whole? What's the one thing you need to be *all that you long to be* deep down in your heart?

I think a good place to start is with Bartimaeus the beggar. “Lord, I want to see.” Oh and not just with these eyes, but with the same kind of eyes that little girl had -- who saw that the young boy beside her was hurting. The same heart-seeing eyes that put things in their proper perspective. The kind of eyes that can look at a child or a beggar or that person who simply rubs you the wrong way, and see them as God's beloved. As someone God values and cares for. And mind you, that isn't overlooking the truth about people. It's just the opposite. It's seeing people as they really are -- as someone who is fearfully and wonderfully made, unworthy and yet so precious to God.

Imagine what would happen if everybody in South Charleston (everybody in the valley) could see with that kind of vision. Just imagine what changes we'd see and what a difference we'd make. Or imagine what would happen if we could so that here in the church, not just

when we worship, but when we meet to do the “business” of the church. Or when we gather in Sunday School classes. Or circle meetings. Or when we talk about the church one on one in the grocery stores and the malls and the restaurants or even on the phone. Oh, if only Jesus was here. If only he would come sit beside us and say, “What do you want, church? What do you want me to do for you?” If only we could say, “Lord we want to see! Give us your vision, Lord, open our eyes!” If only he was here the way he was there ... in Jericho ... with blind Bartimaeus. ✠

Remember the little girl in the second grade who sat beside Tommy? I think, if she could, she would say something to us. If she were here, I think she would open a window and say, “Do you see that tree? Do you see the grass and the flowers and the birds in the air?” And we would say, “Yes.” And then she might tell us to look around in this place -- into the eyes of the people beside us, and into the eyes of the children and youth and the old and the young, and even into our own hearts and say, “Do you see Jesus there?” And if you don’t, does that mean he isn’t there?” L

Years ago, when Tony Campolo was just out of seminary, he was asked to be a counselor for a week at Church Camp for seventh-and-eighth-grade-boys-only-Church-camp. And seventh and eighth grade boys, or middle-schoolers as we call them now, often have a strange sense of humor. You could even call it kind of cruel, at times. Because there are times when they *single out* some poor kid to be the target of their jokes. And they’ll pick on him, and mock him, and just make his life miserable. Because it’s just so much fun, they think. So that’s what they did.

And the boy they singled out was a kid named Billy. And Billy was thirteen. And he had trouble walking... and talking, too. When he walked from one place to another it was as if he had to drag his body along. And sometimes his arms would jerk from side to side. And when he spoke his words were slurred as if he had to force them out.

And the boys, the other boys at camp would mimic his gestures which was funny, they thought. Tony said he heard Billy asking for directions one day. And the words came slowly and painfully. “Which ... way ... is ... the craft

shop.” And of course, the boy he asked mocked him. “It’s ... over ... there ... Billy boy.”

But Tony said the cruelest thing they did was on Thursday morning. Billy’s cabin had been assigned to lead the morning devotions. And his cabin-mates all voted for *him* to be the speaker. They wanted to get Billy up there *in front* of everybody so they could be *entertained*. Thought it would be hilarious.

When Tony found out about it he said he was furious. But it was too late. And it was strange, he said, Billy didn’t seem to mind. Somehow the kid dragged himself up to the lectern. And of course a wave of snickers and giggles went through the crowd. And he just stood and looked at the crowd -- almost as if he was taking the time to look into the eyes of every kid there. And then he spoke. It took him almost a whole minute to say it, but this is what he said: **“Jesus ... loves ... me ... and ... I ... love ... Jesus. And Jesus ... loves ... you ... too.”**

When he finished there was a stunned silence. And Tony said, “When I looked over my shoulder I saw junior-high boys all over the place with tears streaming down

their cheeks. Some of them had their heads bowed. It was like a revival!

The funny thing is Tony says they had been trying all week to find a way to get the message through to these kids but nothing worked. Whatever they tried, whatever they said, the boys just wouldn’t listen. They weren’t interested in that. But when Billy stood and told them what he saw when he looked at them, everything changed. Everything.

And Tony says it so amazing ... that even after all these years people will come up to him somewhere and say something like, “You probably don’t remember me, but I became a follower of Jesus at a Christian camp for junior-high boys where you were a counselor. And do you know what the turning point was for me?” And he doesn’t have to ask, he says. They all say the same thing. “Billy! It was Billy!”

That’s what happens when God opens our eyes. God helps us see each other with deeper eyes... and helps us see that Jesus is here.

And he is here, you know... You don't have to close your eyes and imagine. Jesus is here. And here and now he speaks to your heart and says. "Be on your way. Open your eyes. And follow me in the way of life, abundant and eternal.

This is the word which is given for you. Amen.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

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