

“Clear-Eyed & Open-Hearted”

I expect some of you watch the quiz show “Jeopardy!” It is fun to test my knowledge in widely varying categories. Of course, lots of the knowledge being tested is just trivia. It is knowledge that along with five dollars will get you a cup of coffee. In other words, it is worthless. Many of the categories take us back to college and draw on knowledge we learned in introductory classes. I am thinking of classes like sociology 101, psych 101, art history, and introduction to U.S. History. Today’s Gospel reading draws on our knowledge of Greek Philosophy and specifically Plato.

For those of you who remember something about Plato you may recall that *Timaeus* is the title of Plato's most famous dialogue and the name of its narrator. In *Timaeus* and elsewhere, Plato famously contrasts “seeing” the mere physical world while being “blind” to Eternal Truths. You may recall his allegory of people who are chained in a cave, and who consequently can “see” only fragments of reality because they are blinded by the darkness.¹

This is important because the protagonist in today’s gospel passage from Mark is called Bartimaeus. In Aramaic the prefix *Bar* means “son of”. Thus, the blind man’s name is “son of Timaeus.” It is hard to believe that, given the author of Mark never identifies by name any other people who are cured by Jesus, using this name is not intentional. It is also worth noting that the name is a mash up of Aramaic and Greek, which makes this given name even more likely to be a fabrication for the sake of the reader’s enlightenment (no pun intended).

Mark wants us to be doubly aware of the importance of sight in this healing miracle. It is not just that Bartimaeus does not have use of his eyes. Rather, all the people in the *pericope* he sees better than anyone.

If we revisit what immediately precedes this encounter with the blind man. The passage we heard last week was about James and John requesting seats of honor on either side of Jesus in his glory.² You will recall that the disciples had no idea what they were asking for, and what it would entail. Simply put, sitting with Jesus in his glory would require martyrdom. They were blind to the cost of their request even when Jesus makes it plain, they would have to drink the cup that he would drink.

Today a crowd is following Jesus as he makes his way to Jerusalem through Jericho. While Jesus is crowded in on all sides by people, we do not hear them say anything. Then the blind beggar cries out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”³ Rather than the crowd taking up the chant they sternly order Bartimaeus to be quiet. He continues to shout even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”⁴ These are the first times that anyone in Mark’s Gospel calls Jesus “the Son of David.” A blind man is the first one to recognize Jesus in this royal and messianic manner. A man who cannot see is the first one who “sees” Jesus for who he is.

The power of sight is so important. Even when we have a mild deficit in our eyesight it can affect our lives tremendously. I remember having cataract surgery. The results of which were amazing. It was as if scales had fallen from my eyes. Yet after the surgery I realized that my vision was still impaired. I would need glasses to read

¹ Dan Clendenen, Journey with Jesus <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/3760-i-want-to-see>

² Mark 10:35-45

³ Mark 10:47b NRSVUE

⁴ Mark 10:48b NRSVUE

books, the computer screen, and road signs. So much of what we do is predicated on our ability to see.

Yet, as crucial as our vision is, our ability to see with the mind is also important. Seeing eternal truths as Plato called them is necessary to living a meaningful life. If we only trust what we experience in the physical world our lives are limited. We base much of how we live on ideals such as our choices of career, donations, voting, and so much more. Our five senses can only provide us with information that we might use in assembling our ideals and they are imperfect.

Consider how we manage science. We seek perfect knowledge but expect that every discovery will lead to yet another discovery. Additionally, our handling of these discoveries is flawed by our limited knowledge and our egos. We discover nuclear fission which can lead to ways of producing energy, but our first use is to create a weapon a weapon that hangs over us to this day.

While perfection in this life is unobtainable, still we seek it. We use our mind's eye to imagine what the eternal truth is. We look through that eye to discern the difference between truth and illusion, between facts and what some have called "alternate facts." Jesus wants us to use all our senses including the mind's eye when looking for the truth.

One other aspect of our humanity that Jesus wants us to use as we discern eternal truth is our heart. Which reminds me of a wise fox that teaches a young boy an essential lesson.

In the beloved novel *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry the Little Prince and the Fox have a long discourse about responsibility that the human has to those she or he tames. As the conversation nears the end the Fox makes an important statement. As the Little Prince is about to depart the Fox offers him "the present of a secret."

"Goodbye," said the fox. "And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." "What is essential is invisible to the eye," the Little Prince repeated, so that he would be sure to remember.⁵

It is essential to remember that what we see with our eyes is not the whole story. We must also engage the mind's eye to get at the eternal truth. But neither the sight of our eyes or our minds are enough. The people crowded around Jesus did not see the truth about him that the blind man did. We must also engage our heart to be fully sighted, for as the Fox said, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." Without the sight of his heart Blind Bartimaeus would never have known to cry out "Jesus Son of David have mercy on me." What was invisible to his eyes was there in his heart. Thus, he saw rightly and was healed. Being healed he was able to follow Jesus from there on. Never forget that there is more than one way of seeing and seeing with the heart is essential today and every day.

⁵ *Le Petit Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry