

This is a true story. Charley Boswell was blinded in World War II while rescuing a buddy from a burning tank. Charley had always been a great athlete so, after the war, he took up golf. And he was astoundingly good at it. In short, Charley Boswell won the National Blind Golf Championship 16 times, once shooting a score of 81.

In 1958 Charley went to Ft. Worth, Texas to receive the coveted Ben Hogan Award in honor of one of the greatest professional golfers in history. Mr. Hogan agreed to play a round of golf with Charley. Charley said, "Would you like to play for money?" Hogan said, "That wouldn't be fair!" Charley said, "C'mon, Mr. Hogan, are you afraid to play a blind golfer?" Hogan was really competitive so he said, "OK, I'll play for money. How much?" Boswell said, "\$1,000 per hole." Hogan said, "That's a lot. How many strokes do you want me to give you?" Boswell said, "No strokes. I'll play you heads up." Hogan said, "Charley, I can't do it. What would people think of me taking advantage of a blind man?" Boswell smiled and said, "Don't worry, Mr. Hogan, our tee time is tonight at midnight!" (DYNAMIC PREACHIN, Oct-Dec 2018, p. 19)

Once again we have a richly layered gospel to unpack. We call the blind man Bartimaeus, but we do not know if that was his actual name. Bar means 'son of,' in Aramaic. He was the son of Timaeus. So Bartimaeus may be his given name, as when we name a son with the father's name and add 'Jr.' But it is also possible that no one bothered to call this man's given name anymore, simply referring to him as the son of his father. It could be just one more in a long set of insults and oversights this man endured on a daily basis. He was blind, unable to see anyone, but gradually everyone around him also became blind to him, as he slowly disappeared from view beside the bustling crowd on the road, a mere crumpled heap of castaway humanity, as if just another piece of litter in the ditch. (help from GRACEWORKS, 28 Oct 2018, p. 21)

This is the last miracle in Mark's Gospel – as long as we don't count the anti-miracle of Jesus cursing the fig tree (11:12-14). While it is the last, and therefore by some measures, the greatest, what is more striking is the fact that this is the second time Jesus heals a blind man in this Gospel. These two healing miracles form what is called 'a Marcan sandwich,' – think of an oreo cookie -- and the cream of this oreo cookie – the middle part -- was Jesus' three attempts to get His disciples to understand who He was by making His predictions of His passion and death on the cross.

The first healing (Mk 8:22-26) was also the only time Jesus' healing power did not work immediately and totally; Jesus had to touch the man's eyes twice before he saw clearly. The first blind man was very much like the disciples whom Jesus had to teach again and again before they began to see clearly who he was.

In Mark's Gospel, Bartimaeus was the first person to speak of Jesus as a Son of David and his use of that title prepared for the way the crowds would welcome Jesus into Jerusalem with that same title (Mk 11:10). By recognizing Jesus as the son of the great King David, Bartimaeus was calling Jesus to respond as a particular kind of royal savior. Isaiah had prophesied that the Davidic king would bring justice for the poor and needy (11:4). Psalm 72 describes the ideal king as one who rescues the poor when they cry out. Those allusions provide a backdrop to interpret Bartimaeus' cry and recognition of who Jesus was. This is echoed in the choice of the first reading from Jeremiah, where we read that God will gather everyone from the ends of the world, *with the blind and the lame in their midst...*

Additionally, Bartimaeus called out a very specific request. He begged, "Have pity on me!" He wasn't asking for the pity or compassion Jesus showed people like the hungry crowd of Mark 6:30. Bartimaeus used the Greek word ELEO which we repeat whenever we pray, KYRIE ELEISON. That word, often translated as

mercy rather than pity, refers to an active desire to do something to alleviate the distress of someone who is suffering. It may, as in our penitential rite, include forgiveness, but it is more than that. Bartimaeus' plea for mercy implied that he believed Jesus had the power and the will to change his condition if only He were made aware of his need.

And as I reminded you last week, Jesus asks Bartimaeus the same question he asked the ambitious James and John who were seeking places of honor in Jesus' kingdom: "What do you want me to do for you?" Mark designed the story of Bartimaeus to be a corrective alternative to the disciples' attitudes and actions.

Finally, we are told that Bartimaeus throws off his cloak. A poor man's cloak was his most precious possession. It was so much more than a security blanket. It was his protection from the cold of the night, and his shade from the scorching heat of the sun. A man's cloak was his last vestige of human dignity. It was the one possession that could not be taken to pay off a debt according to Jewish law. But he left his coat behind as he staggered toward the voice of Jesus. In other words, he committed himself fully to the hope that Jesus could and would heal him. By leaving his coat behind before he was even healed, Bartimaeus demonstrated his great faith. He had no Plan B. He jumped without a safety net, or a back-up plan. He traded in his security blanket for a new life in Christ. And in this, he did something that the rich man (10:17-21) we heard about a few weeks ago -- was unable to do. (help from GRACEWORKS, p. 22 and Willimon, PULPIT RESOURCE, Oct-Dec, p. 12-13)

Second, Bartimaeus becomes a model of discipleship for us. In last Sunday's Gospel the disciples' ambitions prevented them from seeing and understanding: they were spiritually blind to Jesus' message. This blind beggar, on the other hand, sees clearly who Jesus is -- appeals to Him for help, places his faith in Christ as the only source of life and light, and is dedicated to following Christ. What does Bartimaeus teach us about discipleship?

Bartimaeus is PERSISTENT -- he knows that he is in need and that only Jesus can help him. We have largely swallowed the cultural lie that we make things happen on our own, and we can easily think we don't have much need for God. I'm reminded of the story of God and the scientist. The scientist said he could create life out of the earth too, and challenged God to a contest. The scientist gathered some dirt and met with God. God said, "no, no -- you have to make your own dirt." Everything we have comes from God, and so we are forever in need of His grace.

Bartimaeus had FAITH. Based on what? He had never heard Jesus preach. Never met Him. Never actually confirmed that the miracle stories were even true. And that is just the point. This man who could not see with his eyes, could see with his heart and his hope exactly who Jesus was. He lacked eyesight, but he did not lack insight. He saw with the eyes of faith. When you and I look at the world with the eyes of faith -- we only see brothers and sisters, not rivals or aliens or poor or rich or whatever. And when we see with the eyes of faith, we know that God is working all things out for the good whether we can see the plan or not.

Bartimaeus FOLLOWED. He traded in his security blanket for a new life in Christ. He went out on the path of discipleship. And with his new eyes, Bartimaeus followed Jesus as He ascended the rocky road leading from Jericho up to Jerusalem. And just one week later in this gospel, with his new eyes Bartimaeus would have seen Jesus take the last few steps up the rocky path outside Jerusalem leading to Calvary. But that is the path of the follower of Christ, all the way to the cross. (help from AT HOME, op.cit, and GRACEWORKS, op.cit.)

Third, two examples of coming to see with the eyes of Christ, the eyes of faith. Samantha had just finished college and was about to embark in the 'real world.' Her mother warned her: "You are about to enter a really weird time in your life, and I can't prepare you for it. Just be aware."

Eager to move on from college in Tennessee, she moved back to her hometown of St. Louis and landed a job as a nanny with a wealthy and extremely likable family. It was a great job for a nanny – but this was not what she envisioned her life to be. While her friends were going off to law school or beginning promising new careers in great cities or getting married, she was mastering toasting the perfect EGGO waffle.

Samantha second-guessed her decision to flee Tennessee and tortured herself with feelings of insignificance and failure. It was turning into that 'weird time' her mother warned her about. Then came one of those 'aha!' moments when things become unmistakably clear. She was playing outside with her little charges when one of them came up and said, "You're so great. You don't even have to play with us but you do it anyway. Our other nannies never did that. We love you!"

Samantha was floored. Not only did she underestimate the kids' ability to be so gracious, but they made her realize that it's truly not about what life hands you but what you do with it. Samantha writes: "I could easily just patrol these girls, make sure they don't run out in the street or draw all over the walls, but I don't. I play with them. I make my life part of theirs and vice versa. And together, we have perfected the fine art of EGGO toasting. How many people can say that?"

Samantha discovered that "self-worth is where you find it and that the most beautiful form of self-worth occurs when you maximize the amount of love you share with the world, no matter how mundane or humble the circumstances may be....Just because you have a college degree doesn't mean you need a job with a Blackberry." That's seeing the world with Bartimaeus eyes, Jesus' eyes.

And lastly, a professor of ministry and spirituality asked her students to take part in a little experiment. She directed them to look around the classroom and focus on one particular color: for example, take note of everything that is red. After a few moments, she asked them to close their eyes and quietly recall the red items they saw. Then comes the unexpected: With their eyes still closed, the professor asks them to name all the BLUE things they have seen. Most often, because they were so focused on the color red, they missed all the blue and any other color.

The professor explains that this is similar to what we focus on in everyday life: "We focus on the negative and tend to notice all that is going wrong in our world, and we miss God's grace and presence before us. What we focus on is what we give power to! In focusing on the negative we miss God's grace." I know I need to hear this over and over again. There's a lot of negativity out there – even in our parish -- and it's easy to become part of it. But it's not the life of discipleship to which we are called. May we allow God to cure our blindness – and see the world with eyes of faith – eyes of love. Let the Church say Amen. (two stories from CONNECTIONS, October 2018, p. 4)