

A man walks into a bar with a slab of asphalt under his arm and says: "A beer please, and one for the road."

Two cannibals are eating a clown. One says to the other: "Does this taste funny to you?"

A woman has twins and gives them up for adoption. One of them goes to a family in Egypt and is named "Ahmal." The other goes to a family in Spain; they name him "Juan." Years later, Juan sends a picture of himself to his birth mother. Upon receiving the picture, she tells her husband that she wishes she also had a picture of Ahmal. Her husband responds, "They're twins! If you've seen Juan, you've seen Ahmal."

And my favorite: Mahatma Gandhi, as you know, walked barefoot most of the time, which produced an impressive set of calluses on his feet. He also ate very little, which made him rather frail and with his odd diet, he suffered from bad breath. This made him (Are you ready for this? It's so bad, it's good!) It made him "A super calloused fragile mystic hexed by halitosis!"

Ok, down to business. This is the last healing story in the Gospel of Mark, which is a good indication that it's going to be a pretty loaded story. We immediately note the man's name – or LACK of name – he is simply called BAR TIMAEUS – the son – of Timaeus. We know his father's name, but we don't know his. As a blind beggar, he wouldn't have counted for much in the society of the day. But with Jesus, he is treated with dignity and respect. It's not in THIS text, but we know from the entire Bible that we all have a name from God – beloved – sons and daughters, and therefore, brothers and sisters with all the peoples of the world. And true to the way GOD treats all people, Jesus treats this man with no name as a son of God. "What do you want me to do for you" Jesus asks. It seems an absurd question to ask a man who is blind, but it shows the deep respect Jesus has for him – Jesus doesn't presume anything – maybe his blindness was not Bartimaeus' deepest need. How often do we think we know just what others need or want? We give advice, "You should do thus and so," without trusting the wisdom and wishes of the other. No, Jesus, who of all people would know the inner state of another, empowered Bartimaeus by asking Bartimaeus what HE wanted. Jesus listened to his wishes, and listened between the lines. (help from LECTIONAID, Sept-Nov 2015, p. 36)

"I want to see," and Jesus gives him the gift of sight. Obviously, the whole reality of the man's blindness can also be read on a metaphorical level. We are all blind in so many ways beyond the physical. We often do not see one another as the beloved ones of God. WE do not see the poor as our brothers and sisters. In his book TATTOOS ON THE HEART, Jesuit priest Gregory Boyle tells of his work with Latino gangs in Los Angeles. He writes: "Mother Teresa diagnosed the world's blindness in this way: we've just 'forgotten that we belong to each other.' .....Kinship has a way of sneaking up on you even as you seek to create it," Fr. Boyle writes. "I celebrate Mass in 25 detention institutions. After Mass, I hand out a card. The infomercial is always the same: 'Call me when you get out. I'll hook you up with a job – take off your tattoos – line ya up with a counselor. I won't know where you are, but with this card, you'll know where I am. Don't slow drag. Cuz if you do, you'll get popped again and end up right back here. So call me.'"

"So a homie (that's one who's been in prison) named Louie, 17 years old, appears in my office one day, bright, happy, smiling. Never in my life had I seen more hickeys on a human being than on this guy. His entire neck is spotted with them. Even his cheeks are covered. I'm thinking Mr. Guinness of the world records might be interested in talking to Louie.

'So, here I am,' he says, arms outstretched, 'I just got out yesterday,' and he points at me with glee, 'and YOU....are the VERY FIRST person I came to see.'

I look at this giddy gang member and say, 'Louie...I have a feeling I was your SECOND stop.'

The two of us collapse in laughter and suddenly, there's a kinship so quickly. Not service provider and service recipient. No daylight to separate – just 'us.'

Exactly what God had in mind. Often we strike the high moral distance that separates 'us' from 'them,' and yet it is God's dream come true when we recognize – we SEE – that there exists no daylight between us. Serving others is good. It's a start. But it's just the hallway that leads to the Grand Ballroom. Kinship – not serving the other, but being one with the other. Jesus was not a 'man for others'; He was one WITH others. There is a world of difference in that. Jesus, who is the LIGHT of the world – SEES perfectly. (adapted 187-188)

Second, OUR sight. How do we see God? Because how we see God ultimately determines how we see ourselves – and others – and our world. It's important that we see God as God is – not as some tiny God that we so often make Him to be, but as the God of love and compassion and forgiveness that Jesus revealed God to be. Fr. Boyle tells of 15-year-old-Rigo – in jail and about to make his first communion. Fr. Boyle asked the basic stuff about his family and his life. He asked about Rigo's father.

"Oh," Rigo says, "he's a heroin addict and never really been in my life. Used to always beat my behind (he actually says 'ass' but I'm not sure I can say that word in church, so I'll say 'behind.')

 Then something kind of snaps in Rigo – an image brings him to attention.

"I think I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I came home. Sent home in the middle of the day. Got into some trouble at school. When I got home, my dad was there. He was hardly ever there. My dad says, 'Why they send you home?' And cuz my dad always beat me, I said, 'If I tell you, promise you won't hit me?' He just said, 'I'm your father. Course I'm not gonna hit you.' So I told him."

Rigo is caught short in the telling. He begins to cry, and in moments he's wailing and rocking back and forth. I put my arm around him. He is inconsolable. When he is able to speak and barely so, he says only, "he beat me with a pipe...with...a pipe."

When Rigo composes himself, I ask, "And your mom?" He points some distance from where we are to a tiny woman standing by the gym's entrance.

"That's her over there. There's no one like her." Again, some slide appears in his mind, and a thought occurs.

"I've been locked up for more than a year and a half. She comes to see me every Sunday. You know how many buses she takes every Sunday – to see my sorry (SAME WORD I CAN'T SAY IN CHURCH – BUT!!! It's the back side of our body!)

Then quite unexpectedly he sobs with the same ferocity as before. And gasping through his tears. "7 buses...She takes...7...buses. Imagine."

This, my friends, even this wonderful image can barely even approach the expansive heart of God – a God who takes 7 buses, just to arrive at us. We settle sometimes for less than intimacy with God when all God longs for is this intimacy with US. In Spanish, when you speak of your great friend, you describe the union and kinship as being like the fingernail and the dirt under it. Our image of who God is and what's on God's mind is more tiny than it is troubled. It trips more on our puny sense of God than over conflicting creedal statements or theological considerations.

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The desire of God's heart is immeasurably larger than our imaginations can conjure. This longing of GOD's to give us peace and assurance and healing – and SIGHT – only awaits our willingness to let Him into our lives. Anthony DeMello writes, "Behold the ONE beholding you, and smiling." Do we think of God as SMILING at us? As willing to take 7 buses to get to us when we are imprisoned in our fears, our sin, our own little selves? As the one whose voice breaks through the clouds and says, "You are my BELOVED, in whom I am wonderfully pleased." There is not much tiny in that. God is greater than even the best stuff we can say about Him. (freely adapted from Boyle 26-28, 20)

Third, and finally, what I want for us all – is what this gospel miracle is all about. SIGHT! Many people do not come to church because they have an image of God – but it's not the image that Jesus gave us. It's too small. A wealthy oil baron once commissioned Picasso to paint a portrait of his wife. When the work was completed, the baron was shocked to see the image that had been created. "Why that looks nothing like my wife! You should have painted her the way she really is!" Picasso took a deep breath and said, "I'm not sure what that would be." Without hesitation, the oil baron pulled out his wallet and removed a photograph of his wife saying, "There, you see, this is a picture of how she really is!" Picasso, bending over, looked at it and replied, "She is rather small and flat, isn't she?" (HOMILETICS, May-June 2000, p. 50). I'm afraid that's the reality of many people's picture of God – too small and too flat.

I would like us to see God as Jesus sees Him – as loving us. No matter what we have done – or what we have failed to do. God loves us. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. And there is nothing we can do that will make God love us less. God's nature is to love. I just want us to SEE that – and accept it. A poet wrote "Someone fills the cup in front of us, we taste only sacredness." That's the sight I wish us all to strive for. No more blindness. God loves us. More than 7 buses worth! Amen.