

Rev. Laura Blazek -- Pentecost, Mark 10, 46-52 -- October 25

Since mid-September our readings from Mark have shown us over and over that the disciples just don't get it. They are blind to what Jesus is telling them about His life, His death, and the ministry that the disciples are called to do. Every time I read this portion of Mark, I am reminded of a scene from the movie "A Few Good Men" with Jack Nicholson and Tom Cruise.

"A Few Good Men" is a court room movie about two Marines accused of murder but who claim they were acting under orders from their commanding officer Colonel Jessup played by Jack Nicholson. The Marines are defended by Lieutenant Kaffee played by Tom Cruise. Towards the end of the movie Col. Jessup finds himself on the witness stand being questioned by Lt. Kaffee who is pushing the Colonel to admit that he ordered the murder. Tension mounts, voices become raised until Jessup shouts at Kaffee, "You want answers?"

Kaffee bellows back, "I want the truth!"

Jessup bellows back even louder, "You can't handle the truth!!"

Though I can't imagine Jesus actually bellowing at the disciples like Jack Nicholson, I suspect he wanted to many times. Jesus shared the truth with the disciples through both words and actions, yet, they were too blind to see it. As our lead-in to the gospel reading says, they were "blinded by their own preconceived notions about Jesus." While the disciples weren't physically blind, they were spiritually blind.

So are we. We also are blinded by our preconceived notions about Jesus and what it means to be a follower of Christ. We are blinded by our illusions that we have wrapped around ourselves to protect us from the reality of the world around us. We are blind to the truth that stands before us because the truth isn't something that we handle well. Yet, as disciples of Christ we are called to open our eyes and see.

Today's story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus ends the section of Mark's gospel on discipleship. This section began with the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida. It is significant that Mark begins and ends with the opening of eyes, the healing of blindness. In doing so, Mark shows us that discipleship begins with the opening of our eyes to the truth of Christ, and it continues unto our death with eyes that see the world through the eyes of Christ so that we serve one another rather than lording it over others as we are served.

We are all spiritually blind, though the blindness varies from person to person. Some of us are blind to the simple truth that Jesus loves us, that God loves us unconditionally. We feel unworthy. We think unconditional love doesn't exist or that we are unlovable. We believe that God's love is for others but not for ourselves because our sins are too great, our life insignificant.

Some of us are blind to the truth that our sins are forgiven, paid for by the precious body and blood of Jesus. We are blind to the truth that our church is filled with sinners and that God's mercy isn't just for a select few, but for each and every one of us no matter the greatness of the sin. Instead, we believe that some people, perhaps even ourselves, aren't worthy of God's grace and mercy. Like the crowd in today's story we order those crying out for Christ's mercy and healing touch to be silent.

Some of us are blind to the truth that everyone's life is significant. We all matter. But we live our lives as if our own lives matter more than someone else's because we see life as a contest where the person with the most toys, the biggest house, and the fattest pocketbook wins. We refuse to see the human misery and suffering that goes on around us. It is much easier to believe their misery and suffering is caused by their own choices rather than admitting that choices we made may have contributed to their suffering.

Some of us are blind to the truth that people go hungry in this country- children, parents, veterans, the elderly. We stare into our refrigerators and cabinets full of food and complain that we have nothing to eat while our neighbors starve. In a world full of food, people go to bed hungry every night because we refuse to believe the truth that we can end hunger.

Some of us are blind to the truth of poverty believing that those who live in poverty just don't work hard enough. We refuse to see the cycle of poverty that exists in our nation, the homeless people who live on our streets, and the disabled whose income is just high enough to keep them from getting other assistance so that they can barely manage to exist. Pope Francis once asked, "How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?" All Christians should be asking the same question.

Some of us are blind to the truth that our planet is being destroyed by our greed, by our insatiable desire for the latest and greatest technology, by the arrogance of our disposable society. We don't ask where the components of our new iPhone came from nor do we waste time wondering where our old ones end up. The same is true of our computers, our burnt out toasters, or our cars. We want our food cheap and don't question if it comes at the expense of our natural resources or that it upsets a very delicate ecosystem. Our oceans churn with trash and the very air we breathe is contaminated with pollutants so that air quality reports have become the norm. We are stewards of God's creation, yet we turn a blind eye to the destruction of this fragile Earth, our island home.

We are blind to these truths and so many others. We are blind to those on the margins, those who linger at the edges of our vision. We don't want to see them any more than the disciples did. We don't want to welcome the dirty, the sick, the prisoner, the unwanted children, the hungry or the homeless because they upset that zone in which we feel comfortable and safe. They shatter our carefully constructed illusion that protects us from the reality that surrounds us.

Christ calls us to open our eyes to both the joys and the pain of this world. We come to Christ blind, and he opens our eyes to the truth of His love and the joy that it brings. At the same time, he calls us to see the world that He sees, to reach out to those in pain, to those on the margins, to

bring to others the same joy that Christ brings to us. To follow Christ we have to handle those truths that make us uncomfortable, the truths that make us feel vulnerable, and the truths that we wish we could ignore. In our faith, we must believe that Christ's love surrounds us, giving us strength, giving us courage to stand up even if it means we stand physically alone because spiritually, we are never alone. As followers of Christ, we must ask Christ in His mercy to heal our blindness, whatever it may be, so that we can do the work that he has given us to do, so that God's kingdom flourishes here on Earth.

Amen.