

Bartimaeus 10/25/09
Grinnell, St. Paul's

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On the face of it, this story of Bartimaeus seems much like any other healing story. It is relatively unembellished; it is straightforward. Bartimaeus calls to Jesus, he was sternly ordered to be quiet. He is a little different in that he calls Jesus "Son of David", he persists with his call. Jesus tells the others to call to him, to let him come. Now here is my favorite part: Bartimaeus threw off his cloak—like throwing off the skin of his old life and so preparing for the new life that he had faith was to be his. After that vigorous action he sprang up and went to Jesus. He didn't just get up, he sprang up. We should approach Jesus this way ourselves—spring up, go straight to him leaving behind all that symbolized our old lives.

Now, of course, Jesus could see that Bartimaeus was blind; nevertheless he asked him "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus, then and now, wants us to ask for what we need. This is no trap like the genie trap where someone is given three wishes and manages to waste them all. This is a straightforward request. Addressing Jesus as teacher, B. asks for his sight and Jesus answers, "Go, your faith has made you well."

Let's pause a minute here. When Bartimaeus' eyes are opened, what does he see? He sees the face of Jesus, that is the face of God. This is the face of God that we can bear to see, not the face of God as he was on Sinai when no one could bear to look at him, even Moses had to cover his face. This is the face of God that was cut to human dimensions. This is the face of God that we are privileged to wear ourselves. In each living being around us, we see this face of God; just as in each person, we know that the spark of the Holy Spirit lies within.

We get pretty accustomed to all this and don't think about it a lot. For Bartimaeus, the revelation came suddenly and his reaction was to follow Jesus. So what are to do? We go along in the humdrum of our daily lives. We see, usually, the same people day after day. I think most of us would say that we don't have a lot of time for epiphanies, for intense moments of revelations. I would have a hard time seeing God's glory in the dishes that have to be washed each day, in the clothes that have to be washed, the living room that needs to be picked up and dusted. We bury the possibilities of these moments in the routine of each day.

But we can do more. We can make a habit of doing more. God has given us the gift of seeing, just as he did to Bartemaeus. Only we forget.

Sometimes it is easy. We go on a trip, we may see the Grand Canyon, or the Atlantic Ocean, or the peaks of the Alps. We may go to Europe and everything is so new to us, even the coffee we drink or the breakfast we eat, that we do sit up and take notice.

But I am thinking about how we can see more and feel more in our everyday lives. And when we see more and feel more, we will be closer to God. In fact, we will, in a sense, looking at God's face.

One of my favorite writers, Esther DeWaal, has written a book called Lost in Wonder, Rediscovering the Art of Spiritual Attentiveness. Rediscovering the art of spiritual attentiveness. It is spiritual attentiveness that will keep us alive in God, in the Holy Spirit.

I heard Esther speak about this book when she was writing it. It had occurred to her one day to begin walks with a magnifying glass, rather than the binoculars she usually took. With the magnifying glass, she looked at little stones, at leaves, at the petals of a flower,

and was lost in wonder at their creation, at their existence. And, in a sense, she saw the face of God, creator of everything. She quotes a Bishop John Taylor who said, “We are responsible for most of our own blindness and deafness. Yet the spirit of God goes on renewing the gift. Now I’ll quote from Esther :**Taylor...faces me with two things: my failure to see and hear and the continuing generosity of God. I cry out like the blind man in the Gospels, “Master, I want my sight back!”**, to a Christ who in his earthly life was always healing men and women and restoring them to fullness of life and energy.” She goes on to talk of a way of seeing that is a seeing beyond. It is seeing with the eye if the heart and seeing with the inner eye. She remembers that Thomas Merton said simply and frequently: **Open your eyes and see.**

As I leaf through this book Lost in Wonder, I become lost in wonder myself. I find passage after passage that I want to read to you. But the point the book makes, and that I want to make is that the true wonder is that God created this world, he created the beauty that is all around us. We need to live in awareness of this beauty, of all the tiny details that make up this beauty, for in so doing we live in awareness of God. We know that the world is surely imperfect, that bad things do happen to good people, that we humans have done too much damage to our world and to each other. But as we learn to look

through the ugliness and the sorrow and the disappointments, we will find God. And there lies our salvation.

As Jeremiah promises the children of Israel who have been in exile: With weeping they shall come and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water in a straight path in which they will not stumble.

And finally, as the psalmist promises:

The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed.

Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy.

Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering the sheaves.

These gifts are ours to find. I pray that we never stop trying to see clearly and joyfully.