

“Blind Spots”

Mark 10:46-52

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Today's Scripture reading is about healing the blind man. The story is very simple and straightforward: A blind man, forced to beg because of his disability, hears that Jesus is coming. He shouts out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus hears him, calls him, and heals him. "Immediately, the man regains his sight and follows Jesus." The two important key words in this story are blindness and healing. The blind man asks Jesus, saying, "Let me see again!" And he does. What does this story inspire us to learn and how does it challenge us? Let's begin with blindness. In our Scripture story, the audience was not the blind people, but it would be Jesus' disciples and potential followers. Or it can be you and me. As Jesus worked hard to open the eyes of the disciples, Jesus invites us to break our blindness, open our eyes, see his vision and join his ministry. Truly, Jesus is not talking about our physical healing, but our blind spots to be healed and seen. What do you think the blind spots are?

Let us go back to the Scripture. The blind man's name is Bartimaeus. Naming him in the Bible has a significant meaning, because being blind in Jesus' day had special stigma socially and politically. In Jesus' day, the blind were the most poor because they had no way of earning an income. The only thing that was possible for them to do to survive was to beg. (Even stealing wasn't possible for a blind person!) So, society treated them as outcasts. It meant they have no value as human beings. They were literally marginalized. When Bartimaeus heard Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples, he cried out to have Jesus' attention. Now, it makes sense to us: nobody paid any attention to the blind, not even the disciples, but Jesus did. Jesus lifted them up and cared for them, giving them wholeness and full value in God's name. The blind man had never experienced such a welcoming and it was a life transformational experience for him. The blind man received not only physical healing, but also restoration, belonging in both individual and community relationship with the spirit of welcome and caring love. And he decided to follow Jesus.

What is the blindness within us? How does this story challenge us and our church? First, let us think of ourselves. Being physically blind can be a grave life challenge. The blind cannot see objects as they are. Most of us are not blind so we may not fully understand how hard this handicap may affect someone's life. It might be a life-long burden. And it may also generate fears, despair and hopelessness, not helping us to see new possibilities.

From a spiritual perspective, the blind man's situation symbolizes our blindness to God's vision for us. Bartimaeus was able to regain his sight meeting with Jesus. Our Scripture story assures us that Jesus is our healer and liberator who can break down our barriers and heal our brokenness. In life, there might be no way to get rid of suffering, but in no way, can we eliminate sorrows and fears from our life challenges. But there is always hope, comfort and healing in Christ so we can go on our life journey. Jesus is our rescuer, healer and the source of healing power.

What about our church? As the blind man, Bartimaeus found a hope and a vision for his life and decided to follow Christ Jesus. The church is people of Jesus' disciples and followers like this man. Jesus' ministry and mission of church are the same. We are called to be a hope for the hopeless, a messenger for the good news, especially for those who have never heard about Jesus Christ in their life. We are called to share this great news with them. And we are called to make the disciples of Christ for transformation of this world. Discipleship requires a responsibility that comes out of grace and willingness to serve others who are in need.

I am not merely talking about the poor and homeless, but what about spiritually poor people in our community? When I looked at religion statistics for Fair Oaks based on Sacramento County data, the percentage of population affiliated with a religious congregations is only 36.94% (In the U.S.A., it is 50.2%)¹. The reality in our community is that there are still many people who haven't heard the good news or are being blind to God. Is our church prepared to be a good messenger for the good news to our neighbors? Are we willing to reach out to the unchurched who have never heard about Christ Jesus? Following Christ as his disciples means to find joy and hope in Christ.

The author of a well known hymn, "Amazing Grace" is John Newton. In verse 1, he wrote, "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; Was blind, but now I see." John Newton was a notorious slave trader around 1740's in England. In this hymn, he described himself as a wretch. One day, when his slave ship was sunk and he was rescued in a violent storm, he experienced God's saving grace. Later, he reflected on his personal experience of God's divine touch and grace in this hymn describing, "Was blind but now I see".

¹ <http://www.city-data.com/city/Fair-Oaks-California.html>

Truly, the mission of Church is to proclaim Jesus Christ and share the good news with our neighbors helping them to see and to receive God's grace on life's voyage. We and our church are called to carry on our responsibilities to find the "blind spots" and be there to fill in with our love and care from what we receive in Jesus Christ. I pray that we keep this faith and let our church's ministries continue on by the guidance and blessings of the Holy Spirit. Amen.