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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Pentecost 22

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, today's gospel reading from Mark is about the healing of a blind man named Bartimaeus.

And, whenever we read about Jesus healing a blind man, we have to be conscious of the fact that there is more to "seeing" than simply the notion of physically perceiving the world with our eyes.

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Consider, for instance, another story of Jesus healing a blind man.

Consider the story in the Gospel of John, found in chapter 9 of that gospel.

Here Jesus heals a man, who was born blind.

Now, we don't know if this man is the same Bartimaeus as found in Mark's gospel.

It would seem NOT to be.

It would seem that the blind man healed by Jesus in John chapter 9 is a different man, because in John chapter 9 Jesus heals the blind man by spitting on the ground, making mud, and spreading it on his eyes.

Yuck, right? But you gotta do what you gotta do.

Nonetheless, this is how Jesus heals this blind man in John, chapter 9.

And as a result of this particular healing miracle, the Pharisees are perplexed.

The Pharisees think that maybe the man wasn't actually born blind.

And so, they investigate the matter.

They speak with the man who was formerly blind, and then they speak with the man's parents, and then they speak a second time with the man.

Ultimately, the Pharisees in frustration seemingly banish the man from the synagogue.

Jesus, however, finds the man and they have a talk, in which Jesus tells the man that he (Jesus) came into the world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.

And the "seeing" Jesus refers to here involves more than simply physically perceiving the world with one's eyes.

"Seeing" here refers to understanding Jesus as the one who can forgive sins, as being born blind in the ancient world was understood as a result of sin, whether the man's own sin or the sin of his parents.

So, because Jesus heals the man, he is in effect forgiving the sin of the man and/or his parents.

In other words, in John chapter 9, "seeing" refers to understanding Jesus to be God incarnate, because only God can truly forgive sins.

Jesus' statement that "he came into the world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind..."

Jesus' statement here is a critique of the Pharisees who think themselves to be gifted with insight into God's ways, and yet ironically they do not recognize the power of God in Jesus.

In short, the Pharisees are blind.

And so, yes, in the Bible, "blindness" and "seeing" involves more than simply perceiving the world with one's eyes.

And, if we return to gospel lesson from Mark, we see a similar thing going on in this reading.

Here Bartimaeus is sitting by the roadside.

And when Bartimaeus learns that Jesus is passing by, he begins to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

And then we read that “many” persons were sternly ordering him to be quiet.

Did we hear that?

“Many” persons were shushing him.

But they were not just shushing him.

“Many” persons were ORDERING him to be quiet.

And they were not just ordering him to be quiet.

But “many” persons were STERNLY ordering him to be quiet.

Indeed, “many” persons, including Jesus’ disciples and persons in the crowd who were following Jesus...

“Many” were trying to shut this man up.

Why? What is going on here?

Well, it comes back to this notion of “seeing” being more than simply perceiving the world with one’s eyes.

This blind man named Bartimaeus actually sees, sees quite well in fact, sees better, in fact, than those following Jesus.

Bartimaeus recognizes Jesus for who he is.

Bartimaeus recognizes that Jesus is the very Son of David.

He is, in fact, the first person in the Gospel of Mark to call Jesus the Son of David.

Why this is significant is twofold.

By calling Jesus the Son of David, Bartimaeus understands Jesus to be the Messiah of God, because the Old Testament proclaimed that the Lord’s Messiah would be of the line and lineage of King David.

Bartimaeus seemingly sees Jesus quite clearly as the Messiah of God.

That is the first point.

The second point is that Bartimaeus also understands Jesus as KING of the Jews.

Bartimaeus sees Jesus as the one who is KING.

The Son of David, according to the Old Testament, the coming Messiah would become the KING of the Jews.

And this is why many people are trying to shut up Bartimaeus.

This is why they are trying to silence him, because Bartimaeus is making a political statement here about Jesus.

Bartimaeus is effectively declaring Jesus to be the rightful king in opposition to King Herod, the puppet king of the Romans, whom the Romans set up in Galilee.

Even worse, by Bartimaeus declaring Jesus to be the Messianic king, Bartimaeus is snubbing the Roman Emperor himself, who was king of the Roman Empire, which included the Holy Land.

And again, this is why so many people are sternly ordering Bartimaeus to be quiet, because the people don't want Bartimaeus to attract the attention of the authorities.

They don't want Bartimaeus to invite trouble for Jesus and his movement.

But for all of Bartimaeus' shouting...

For all of Bartimaeus' ranting that Jesus is the Son of David...

For all his uproar, Jesus doesn't rebuke him for it.

Jesus doesn't chide him.

Jesus doesn't tell him to be quiet.

Instead, Jesus affirms Bartimaeus by restoring his sight.

In other words, Jesus seems to say to Bartimaeus, "Because you see aright..."

"Because you see that indeed I am the Son of David, so shall you be able to see physically."

And Jesus heals the man of his blindness because Bartimaeus already sees rightly.

PAUSE

Yes, sisters and brothers in Christ, “seeing” is more than perceiving the world around us physically with our eyes.

To be sure, Christianity is about seeing the world rightly.

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PAUSE

In a writing by C. S. Lewis entitled “Is Theology Poetry?” which is contained in his book entitled *The Weight of Glory*, Lewis said it this way, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun (S-U-N) has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”

We believe in the sun, because we see it.

It is there in the sky.

But we believe in the sun also, because it is how we see everything else.

Christianity is like that.

Faith is like that.

Faith not only empowers us to see God, but faith allows us to see everything else.

There is a reason why Jesus says, “I am the light of the world.”

Jesus helps us perceive the world, not just see it, but to see it rightly.

What do I mean by that? To see the world rightly?

It means that we understand how God is working in the world.

And even Adam and Eve had their eyes “opened” in the Garden of Eden, in the story of Genesis.

Adam and Eve had their eyes “opened” such that they were able to see more clearly.

To see the world rightly is to see how God is working in the world.

To see the world rightly means that we see underneath the veneer that often veils our eyes from God’s presence.

Ultimately, to see the world rightly means we are attuned to God's grace.

PAUSE

We have to ask ourselves, for instance, with respect to say the supply chain disruptions if this is not a blessing in disguise.

We have been hearing that many of the most popular items people want may be unavailable for the holidays.

Is this such a horrific thing? I know the media makes it sound dire, but is it really?

Maybe God's grace is visible in the midst of this supply chain disruption such that we come to appreciate what we have, that we learn to be content.

PAUSE

Or, what about the price increases on everything from food to gas to you name it.

Granted none of us like to have to pay more for things.

But perhaps, there is grace in this, too, in that we learn to be more frugal, and that we learn to prioritize for that which we truly need.

PAUSE

These are only a couple of examples, and I am sure we could name other life circumstances, where we have had our sight adjusted so as to see rightly.

Perhaps there are other instances where we have seen God's grace which was there all along, just lurking under the surface of everyday life, and suddenly it was made apparent.

PAUSE

In truth, our worship life is like this. Our worship life is meant to help us see rightly.

During worship we gather and the first thing we do every time we gather is confess our sins.

We acknowledge our brokenness. Indeed, we acknowledge that we are captive to sin.

But for many in society, there is no recognition of sin whatsoever.

But sin is pervasive. Sin is real in this world. And sin takes hold of us.

And the only way to unburden ourselves, so as to see rightly, is to confess our sin and receive the mercy of God.

That is what it means to see rightly. Here in this place we have our vision adjusted.

Here we learn then to be merciful like God. Here we learn to be just. Here we learn to be gracious, like God is gracious to us.

Here we learn to love our neighbor even as Christ first loved us.

Indeed, if we have come here, and if we have encountered our Lord Jesus Christ here, like the blind man Bartimaeus who once encountered Jesus...

If we come here and have an encounter with Jesus, but still go forth from this place not seeing the world differently, then something is amiss.

Then maybe we ourselves to call all out to Jesus like Bartimaeus, "Jesus, Son of David, Jesus, Messiah, Jesus, King of Creation, Jesus...have mercy on me."

Maybe we need to ask of Jesus like Bartimaeus once did, "Jesus, let me see again."

Let me see the world not as the world sees. But let me see you, Jesus, you who are the light of the world.

Let me see you, and like the Sun that shines upon the world, let me then see everything else...like the neighbor in need, like the injustice that haunts society, like the greed and want that infects my heart, and let me see the grace of God.

Yes, sisters and brothers in Christ, we need to pray that we may see the grace of God in us that we can be the grace of God in the world.

Let us see rightly, and so then give thanks God. Amen.