

**We are blind and we need healing.**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

There is a hymn which I almost chose for today's service – It begins like this *“The blind man sat by the road and he cried, the blind man sat by the road and he cried, the blind man sat by the road and he cried. O oo h, show me the way, show me the way, show me the way, the way to go home...”*

The hymn is based on this story I just read about Blind Bartimeaus that does indeed speak of the way, the way to go home, the way back to healing and wholeness, the way to God. Like Bartimeus we too need healing from our blindness. Our blindness is not physical – it is a spiritual blindness. We don't see reality as it really is – but only through the filter of our experience, our assumptions and of our past with all its resentments, of our fears and hurts.

An encounter I had last week was a small example of this. When I was at the university last week I was ordering lunch for my son and myself. I was wearing the full clerical uniform – all black with a dog collar. I asked the waiter for something with steak and chips. He took a second look and said “Wow, that's not very Christian of you”. I won't tell you what else was said in our ensuing conversation but he ended up admitting that his idea of what a Christian was had been built on assumption and prejudice. It was pretty big of him to admit it. I think his picture of being a Christian was the classic one about Christians being meek and mild and in some very real way not 'normal' – steak and chips did not fit the picture at all!

Yet we all see reality through distorted lenses that fragment reality. We all see only a certain part of the story like the blind men and the elephant. (the story)

The elephant is so much more than any one of them can see.

And what we can see is very much determined by what we have going around in our

head.

Have you ever looked through one of those fair ground mirrors that make you either look really skinny and tall or really short and fat? Some women when they look in a normal mirror only see ugliness no matter what they really look like. In fact their vision is clouded by the way their mind understands what beauty is. We see with our mind, which can be full of misconceptions and distortions. Sometimes our blindness is a wilful shutting of our eyes to see things as they really are. Denial is the most powerful of all coping mechanisms and is almost impossible to shift with logic and reasoned arguments.

It would be one thing if our blindness only effected ourselves but the consequences are so much more than that. Our blindness about global warming has brought us to the brink of ecological disaster. Our blindness about the war in Iraq, its reasons and justifications have created another Vietnam, something the White House is openly saying is the reality on the ground. Our blindness about our relationships means we often only see what we want and not what is happening for the other person. Having gone through one marriage and now on my second I feel experienced and confident enough to state that this is a well known and empirically verifiable fact!

As the old English proverb says “There is none so blind as they who will not see”.

However despite his blindness Bartimeaus does see something – he sees that Jesus can help him. He has spiritual sight despite his other types of blindness.

The story of Bartimeaus opens with Jesus and his disciples nearing the end of their journey from Caesarea Philipi in the north of the country, to Jerusalem. They have reached Jericho, which is about 25km from Jerusalem. Throughout all four gospels it is obvious that Jesus is on a journey. On this journey he teaches, heals people, offers forgiveness, confronts and challenges and calls others to follow him. On the way he has had to correct many and manifold misconceptions about who and what he is on about. As he does these things he moves inexorably towards Jerusalem, to his death

by crucifixion. In this passage he is nearly there. He has left behind the rich young man who could not give up his wealth. He has left behind the Galilean sea. He has left behind the other blind man he had cured and sent away. He has left behind countless other men, women and children he has healed.

By the next verse he and his followers have moved through Jericho and appeared to have picked up a large crowd along the way. This happens to Jesus all the time throughout Marks gospel – crowds gather. They have heard about his miraculous power and they want to see, touch and hear him. Perhaps they have come because they are curious – who and what is this man? Can you imagine the expectant energy in the crowd perhaps?

Along the way he and the crowd pass a blind man sitting by the roadside.

Bartimeaus begins to shout out and say “Jesus son of David, have mercy on me!”

This phrase is very revealing. It shows Bartimeaus gets something most other people in Marks gospel have failed to get – even Jesus own followers don’t show the same degree of insight as Bartimeaus. He gets that Jesus is the Messiah, the saviour, the one who brings healing, wholeness and salvation. He gets that Jesus is the one who can bring reconciliation and peace to our fragmented life. He knows that Jesus can heal him, he knows it so strongly that he goes against all odds to declare his need. And people do try to silence him, to deter him, to shut him up. They speak to him sternly but he will not be quiet. He senses something and he risks the pain of reaching out. He risks ridicule and being silenced. He courageously speaks out and Jesus of course hears him.

Millions of people at different stages of life sit by some road, not able to see where they are going. Through friends or by other promptings of God’s Spirit, they hear of Jesus and opposition often follows. Blind Bartimeaus was finally encouraged by some others in the crowd to take heart. Jesus asks him “what do you want me to do for you?”

It is worth stopping at this point in the story to mention something about Jesus and by implication God. Jesus never forces healing on anyone. In the gospel stories he

always heals in response to a request from the person in need or from their family and friends and in all of the stories there is an element of faith. What that means for us is that if we want wholeness in our lives we must first believe it is possible and secondly we must be prepared to make those first steps, to reach out and ask for help from God.

Bartimeaus certainly wanted to be healed and that is exactly what happened. Jesus declares that his faith has made him well and immediately Bartimeaus can see. We can just imagine the joy with which he then follows Jesus.

Bartimeaus who once had extraordinary spiritual sight now has physical sight and of course the only option for him is to follow Jesus. When you have been touched by the healing love of God through the power of Jesus Christ it is almost impossible not to commit yourself to his path. You are like a creek that moves slowly but inexorably to the river, Jesus Christ, the source of life. And you begin the journey of seeing as Christ sees. That is one of the consequences of following in the way of Jesus – we begin to see reality as he does. We see with compassion, forgiveness and love.

A question we can ask ourselves when we hear this story of Bartimeaus is who are we in the story? Are we like Bartimeaus who recognizes he needs healing and wholeness and is prepared to risk ridicule and opposition to come to Jesus, who has the hope and faith to try? Are we like the people in the crowd who try to make him quiet, to shut him up so he does not create any problems? Are we like others in the crowd who see what is happening and say “come, he his calling you”, people who are encouragers and inviters? Or are we like others in the story who we don’t hear about but could possibly have been bystanders, just looking in at all that was happening?

In my studying and reflecting for this sermon I came across the idea that the story of Bartimeaus could be an analogy for the catechumenate program, what we call “Come and See” and we are in the process of getting up and running. People are drawn to Jesus in some way. Despite their reservations they suspect there might just be something in this 2000 year old path to life and wholeness. They might face some opposition. At the very least they will almost certainly get some funny looks from

their atheist friends. However, they still want to know and they are invited, encouraged to “come and see”. To see what being a follower of Christ is all about.

We all need healing, we all crave wholeness, and we are all blind. And we all need encouragement and support to take the steps, to reach out to God.

May we support and love each other as we take the journey together. Amen