

**“A New Vision”**

**Mark 10.46–52**

**The Rev. Hal Chorpensing, Plymouth Cong'l UCC, 26 Oct 2003**

The most unusual gift that I received on the occasion of my ordination came from my sister, Susan, whom I love dearly and who has been the champion of my soul since I was a child. Susan is a master in the Asian healing art of Reiki, and the gift Jean and I received from Susan was a basic course in Reiki and an attunement to perform this healing art. It's not something I use very much, but it really opened me up to the idea that physical healing is a reality.

And healing is a main thrust of this story of Jesus healing blind Bartimaeus; more specifically, it's about the restoration of sight to this man who demonstrates his faith in Jesus by crying out in the midst of a crowd, again and again, even when people were telling him to mind his manners and shut up. But, Jesus stops in the middle of this mob and approaches Bartimaeus and tells him that his faith has restored his sight. It's a miracle!

Anthony de Mello, a Jesuit from India, told this story about a seeker and a spiritual master's disciple: “A man traversed land and sea to check for himself the Master's extraordinary fame. ‘What miracles has your Master worked?’ he said to a disciple. ‘Well, [said the disciple,] there are miracles and *miracles*. In your land it is regarded as a miracle if God does someone's will. In our country it is regarded as a miracle if someone does the will of God.’”<sup>1</sup> Where are the miracles in our midst? Where do we see ourselves and others doing God's will?

So, there is a literal sense in which this story is about Jesus restoring the sight of Bartimaeus. And I'll bet that Bartimaeus never again saw things in quite the same way. Imagine yourself as Bartimaeus, trying to live without the aid of vision and then having your eyes opened because of your faith in Jesus. The blue sky and the orange sunset stand out in their beauty, but then again, you also see the suffering of those around you.

In the Buddhist tradition, the story of Gautama Siddhartha's enlightenment goes like this: the young man who would become the Buddha was a wealthy aristocrat, whose father did not want him to see the suffering of humankind, so he kept him within the palace walls, sheltered from witnessing the ravages of human existence: disease, poverty, death. One day, the young man escaped the confines of the palace and saw the suffering of human existence, which spurred him on to seek enlightenment. Gautama's eyes were opened to the world around him.

Have you ever had that kind of experience? I remember when Jean and I traveled in West Africa before Cameron was born, being approached by legless beggars who rolled up to us on plywood platforms with casters on the bottom. It was a real *eye-opener*, as we say. But, the other thing that opened my eyes on that trip were the experiences of seeing tight extended families as the center of life and also seeing dozens of children share with their friends the pieces of candy that we shared with them.

Sometimes, we're unwilling or unable to see things because they are unpleasant, and we'd rather not see them. At other times, we don't see things because we haven't had the opportunity to *look* at them. Have you ever had that happen? Has there been something that you've had to re-examine in your life, based on a new vision? Something that's caused you to respond by saying, “Oh...now I see!”

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony de Mello, *One Minute Wisdom*, p. 4.

You probably know the story of John Newton, the Anglican curate who wrote “Amazing Grace.” Newton had been a naval deserter, slave trader, a self-described “wretch,” and who had a phenomenal transformation in his life, becoming one of the great voices in Britain for the abolition of the slave trade. You know his words: “I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.”

So, while I don’t doubt that Jesus had the ability to perform healings that we typify as miraculous, I think there is also an amazing metaphorical dimension to this story that we are apt to miss, unless we *look* more closely.



What faith in Jesus gave Bartimaeus and what faith in Jesus gives *us* is a new vision – a new way of seeing the divine, of seeing ourselves and the world around us.

“Taste and *see* that God is good,” sings the Psalmist, “Taste and see...” When we come to the communion table, we literally taste that God is good and has blessed us richly – extravagantly – by sharing Jesus with us. And whether you see the incarnation as a rich metaphor of “God with us” or as a literal manifestation of God’s very self in human form, the extravagant blessing remains.

Do you *see* that God is good? If not, look around you! Look at the miracle of life within yourself! The fact that you are sitting here and that the presence of the holy is within you – within each of us – is nothing short of miraculous. *God is good!*

So, what else are we to perceive with the vision that faith provides us? In the words of Teresa of Avila that I quoted last Sunday, “Yours are the *eyes* through which Christ’s compassion is to look out to the world.”

How have your eyes been opened, and how do you respond? How is Christ’s compassion envision through you? Is it through the Crop Walk, because you’ve seen how others live and how you might help to alleviate a small aspect of their suffering? Is it because you know that many people in Ft. Collins live on the economic margin, so you volunteer with our Homelessness Prevention Program? Is it because you know that exclusion of GLBT folks is a *real* injustice, so you joined an Open and Affirming Church?

On Friday afternoon, I picked up a voicemail from a woman who was very concerned about the UCC’s policy of inclusion of non-straight folks in the life of the church. And she used the old chestnut, “love the sinner and hate the sin.” We talked, and I could tell that neither of us was making much headway in our discussion. And I asked what she thought about Paul’s idea that women should not teach or speak in the church, and she said that her feeling was that it would be okay for women to teach children and other women, that they shouldn’t preach to and teach men, and that just as Jesus Christ is the head of the church, the man is the head of the household. And I will tell you what I told her: that the Congregational tradition of the UCC has been ordaining women since 1857 and that our denomination has been Open and Affirming since 1985. She and I *see* things differently. One of the hallmarks of our denomination is that we are willing to look at things and re-examine our stances.

What is it that makes it possible for us to *see*? In a literal sense, it is *light* and the ability to perceive it through our optic nerve. In a metaphoric sense, it is God’s *light* and our ability to perceive it in our hearts and minds.

In 1620, as our Separatist Pilgrim forbears were leaving Leiden, in the Netherlands, their minister, the Rev. John Robinson told them to steer clear of the doctrinal errors of both orthodox Lutheranism and Calvinism. He said to them “the Lord has more truth and *light* yet to break forth out of his holy Word.” God gives us minds and hearts not so that we can be static and unchanging in our faith, but so that we can

experience growth and transformation. There is an amazing wideness of possibility that this opens up for us as God's people.



One of the great things about being the parent of young children is the opportunity to become reacquainted with children's literature and the wisdom it contains. Many of you know the wonderful book, *The Little Prince*, by a French nobleman, Antoine de St.-Exupéry, written while he was pilot during World War II. The little prince shares with us this secret: that "it is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

Cameron, my eight-year-old son, and I talked about this yesterday afternoon, and he had trouble with the concept of seeing with the heart, and I asked him what love looked like...whether he could see it with his eyes...whether he could see it with his heart. I asked him what faith looked like...whether he could see it with his eyes...whether he could see it with his heart. "What is essential is invisible to the eye."

Just because you cannot see something with your eyes does not mean that it is not real: whether it is a subatomic particle or God's unconditional love for you. The miracle is that God can shed light and make things visible to us for the first time: the essential things that we see with our hearts.

God's light breaking forth allows us to envision new possibilities for ourselves, our congregation, and God's world. I'd like to close with a poem from Emily Dickinson:

I dwell in Possibility—  
 A fairer House than Prose—  
 More numerous of Windows—  
 Superior—for Doors—  
  
 Of Chambers as the Cedars—  
 Impregnable of Eye—  
 And for an Everlasting Roof  
 The Gambrels of the Sky—  
  
 Of Visitors—the fairest—  
 For Occupation—This—  
 The spreading wide my narrow Hands  
 To gather Paradise—

Amen.