

Mark 10.46-52

Four of five years ago, I listened
to a man speaking about light and darkness,
being sighted and being blind.
He was a lecturer in theology and was blind himself.
As a boy and young man he had had sight
so he knew what the world looked like
but now it was dark.
His talk was full of humour
and I remember how laughter was constantly breaking out
as he talked and answered our questions.
What I remember was the way he helped us understand
that sometimes the blind see more clearly
than those whose sight blinds them to the truth.

How often we make judgements about people
according to what we see.
We value one person highly because they are well dressed
and walk with a confident swagger.
We look down on another person
because they are dressed in jeans
and have one of those hooded jackets.
We make assumptions about them because of what we see.
The person who is blind has to decide what a person is like
by using their other gifts,
especially their gift of hearing.

Bartimaeus makes his judgement
based on the reports he has received of Jesus.
In an age before newspapers
the conversation in the small towns would have been based
on the news that passers by brought with them
and the gossip of what was happening in their own town.
Jericho was on one of the main roads to Jerusalem
and no doubt word had been passed around about
what this man Jesus was doing and saying “up north” in Galilee.
When Jesus comes to Galilee,
Bartimaeus has made up his mind who Jesus is
and is determined to meet with him!
“Son of David,” he cries, **“have mercy on me!”**

“Son of David” had become a title for the Messiah,
the new leader of Israel for whom many were waiting.
Apart from Simon Peter at Caesarea Philippi
and the wild ravings of those possessed by unclean spirits
Bartimaeus is the first person to give Jesus this title!
The crowd tell him to be quiet!
They are embarrassed, shocked,
that he should speak of Jesus in this way.

Jesus calls him and Bartimaeus leaves behind his beggar's rug onto which people would have thrown their coins.

Then two things happen.

First, he receives his sight.

Secondly, he becomes a disciple, and the man who had been a seated, spectator on the world, now follows Jesus on the way to Jerusalem and the cross.

Even blind Bartimaeus doesn't see perfectly.

Jesus wasn't happy with the title "Messiah"

because he knew it came with all sorts of expectations that he wasn't going to fulfil in the way people expected.

But he saw more than those who could see out onto the world.

Perhaps this reading says two things to us.

First, the importance of seeing beyond what we see with our eyes.

Indeed, our very presence here this morning says that we have seen in a crucified carpenter the one who is the very image of God.

We see bread and wine upon our table but we know it be the means

by which we renew our commitment to Christ and once again welcome him with joy!

Perhaps one of our prayers ought to be

that God will make us more and more aware of that which we can not see with our eyes, the reality which lies within and beyond this world: the presence of God, the love of God, the power of God to give new life and hope.

Secondly, we just note that Bartimaeus doesn't cheer Jesus from the pavement as he leaves for the challenges that await him in Jerusalem.

He follows.

Mark in his Gospel, invites all his readers to join Bartimaeus as he follows Jesus "on the way", living no longer for ourselves but for him who lived and died for us, and whose resurrection spirit is with us this day. Amen.