

Proper 25 B Sermon  
Mark 10:46-52  
October 24, 2021

*Truly Seeing*  
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

*<sup>46</sup>They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup>When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>48</sup>Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>49</sup>Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” <sup>50</sup>So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup>Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” <sup>52</sup>Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.*

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In January of 1933, The Atlantic Monthly ran an article entitled “Three Days to See” which was written by none other than Helen Keller, the famed deaf/blind American author, political activist, and lecturer. In “Three Days to See,” Keller states that most people take life, and their senses for granted. She imagines how she would use her eyes if she were to be given three days of sight. On the first day, Keller writes, she would want to see the people dearest to her, calling them close and looking long into their faces, imprinting upon her mind the outward evidence of the beauty within. She would want to look into the face of a baby, the eyes of

her dogs, to view the small and simple things of her home, to walk in the woods and intoxicate her eyes on the beauties of the world of Nature, to see a sunset.

On the second day, Keller would arise at dawn to see, as she says, the thrilling miracle by which night is transformed into dawn. She would see museums and the theater or movies.

On the third day she would see her city, New York, her suburban neighborhood, the bridge and the river, the city center and the view from the Empire State Building, Fifth Avenue, then the slums, factories, and parks before going to the theater to watch a hilariously funny play. Three days, storing up memories for the long night ahead. If we were faced with the same challenge, she writes, “Then, at last, you would really see, and a new world of beauty would open itself before you.”<sup>1</sup>

Is it any wonder that Bartimaeus wanted to see?

Mark’s story of the healing of a blind man is a wonderful story. It’s Helen Keller’s dream come true, but not for just three days. It was for a lifetime. This is the kind of story we love to hear on Sunday mornings, or anytime really, because it has a happy ending and if Blind Ole Bart could have a happy ending, maybe we can too. There is, however, much more to this story.

As you will remember, last week’s Gospel Lesson told of Jesus’ friends arguing over who would receive places of honor in his coming kingdom. Despite predicting his own fast-approaching passion and death, Jesus’ friends still believed that he would overthrow the oppression of Rome and rule Israel like their ancestor King David. They had been on the road with Jesus for nearly three years, had seen him heal, had heard him preach and

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Keller. “Three Days to See,” Theatlantic.com, January 1933,  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1933/01/three-days-to-see/371679/>

teach, and yet after all this time, they still didn't really know him—didn't really see him.

Bartimaeus, on the other hand, though blind, immediately recognized Jesus and called him Son of David—an illusion to Jesus' messianic purpose and an explicit link to David's city, Jerusalem, where Jesus would soon be tried and executed. In contrast to Jesus' friends, Bartimaeus was the embodiment of the perfect disciple—one who not only saw Jesus, but also knew him, understood his purpose, was called by Jesus, healed by faith, and then followed without fear. Bartimaeus was blind, but he saw Jesus for who he really was. Before we're too quick to judge the disciples, though, I wonder how often we see things, see people, without really registering and processing what we're seeing. Who and what do we miss?

The crowd around Bartimaeus that day were really the blind ones. Day in and day out, he sat by the road begging for coins from passersby. He was mostly ignored, occasionally reproached, and rarely pitied with a coin. But he was never comforted. He was never befriended. He was never welcomed into community. When a famed teacher and healer strode into town, the crowd was quick to shush the pesky blind man, to remind him of his place, to shut him up and sit him down so they could just go on ignoring him. Not Jesus, though. Jesus *saw* Bartimaeus, just as Bartimaeus truly *saw* Jesus, called him over, and asked what he wanted from him. Jesus acknowledged him, gave him back his voice, and then gave him back his physical sight.

If I'm honest, this is much more than a healing story and I really don't think it has much to do with physical sight. It's more nuanced than that. This story is a reminder that there is much more to sight than eyes.

In the story, “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s famous character, Sherlock Holmes, explores this nuance with his partner, Dr. Watson:

“You see, but you do not observe,” says Holmes. “The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.”

“Frequently,” Watson agreed.

“How often?”

“Well, some hundreds of times.”

“Then how many are there?”

“How many? I don’t know.”

“Quite so!” exclaimed Holmes. “You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, *I* know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed.”<sup>2</sup>

I wonder how often we see things, see people, without really observing them, as Holmes says. Who and what do we miss?

Bartimaeus’ eyes, his sight, really isn’t the point of the story. Ours is, though. This story is meant to open *our* eyes, not just the physical eyes in our eye sockets, but also the full comprehension of our minds and the power of all our senses. This story is meant to send us forth *truly* seeing. I wonder: who and what have *we* been missing?

Last week, in a beautiful and deeply meaningful way, this congregation let the Rev. Gary McCann know that he’d been *truly* seen. With speeches, gifts, decorations, special music and a lovely meal, you celebrated his 35 years with you as minister. Better than the accolades, party, and gifts, the very best gift you gave him was the knowledge that he had been truly seen and truly known by you.

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle. “A Scandal In Bohemia,” Etc.usf.edu, <https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/32/the-adventures-of-sherlock-holmes/345/adventure-1-a-scandal-in-bohemia/>

I have a feeling that he already knew that, but it's always good to be reminded. It feels good to be *truly* seen.

Helen Keller offers this exhortation to the sighted:

I who am blind can give one hint to those who see—one admonition to those who would make full use of the gift of sight: Use your eyes as if tomorrow you would be stricken blind. And the same method can be applied to other senses. Hear the music of voices, the song of a bird, the mighty strains of an orchestra, as if you would be stricken deaf tomorrow. Touch each object you want to touch as if tomorrow your tactile sense would fail. Smell the perfume of flowers, taste with relish each morsel, as if tomorrow you could never smell and taste again. Make the most of every sense; glory in all the facets of pleasure and beauty which the world reveals to you through the several means of contact which Nature provides. But of all the senses, I am sure that sight must be the most delightful.<sup>3</sup>

Let us pray with Bartimaeus: O God, let us see. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Helen Keller. "Three Days to See," Theatlantic.com, January 1933,  
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