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“What is Seen Cannot Be Unseen” **Sermon on Mark 10:46-52**

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We live in a day of super-fast communication, and yet we have a failure to communicate. We are fragmented, speaking different languages. It's hard to understand those who come from another planet. We enter conversations wondering whether someone will pull a verbal knife on us. “Things fall apart, and the center cannot hold.” It is a tricky world in which we live.

Once there was a man named Joshua who tried to get everyone on the same page by saying, “Choose this day whom you will serve... you have a billion gods you worship. ...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” This has been our theme though the fall.

The choice of serving the Lord isn't a choice made once in a lifetime, but a choice made moment to moment.

When you wake up on the wrong side of the bed, how do you choose to serve the Lord?
How do you choose to serve the Lord when your patience is wearing thin?
How do you choose to serve the Lord in relationships that have gone stale?
How can you choose to serve the Lord at your workplace?
Or, when you're trying to catch your next flight?

The opportunity to choose the Lord will present itself moment to moment. We will see the choice being made in our scripture passage today.

Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶ 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. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹ 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.” ⁵⁰ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher,^[a] let me see again.” ⁵² Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

“What do you want me to do for you?” When Jesus asked James and John that question, what they wanted was to be seated next to Jesus, “one on his left hand and right hand” in his glory. They should have known better. They should have known that his glory wasn’t throne and scepter. His glory was to be a cross. They had been told that multiple times by Jesus, but had not eyes to see, nor ears to hear.

“What do you want me to do for you?” When Jesus asked Bartimaeus that question, Bartimaeus answered, “My teacher, let me see again.”

Jesus repairs Bartimaeus’ eyesight. But Jesus does nothing for Bartimaeus’ hearing. Because after the miracle Jesus says, “Go. I mean, go! Go and see the world with all its marvelous fall colors. Go and see the smiles of the children. Go and see your mom and dad! Go, you need to see it all.” You wouldn’t have to tell me twice.

But Bartimaeus doesn’t follow the order because he can see again, and all he can see is Jesus. What is seen, cannot be unseen. With Jesus, Bartimaeus now sees everything differently. There are some scholars who argue that Bartimaeus was a philosophy major. Every parent’s nightmare.

We can spend \$58,000 a year on trying to answer the question, “What’s it all about, Alfie?” “I’ll tell you what it’s about son, it’s about getting a job and getting off my payroll. That’s what it’s about.”

Philosophy – not everyone is into it. Some see it as a waste of time. All that sitting around and thinking when you could be going shopping. Wondering, when we need to be getting down to brass tacks?

A philosophy major – do you have one in your life somewhere? Maybe a brother-in-law you’re forced to bring to the Titans game because they said it would be “good for you two to spend some quality time together.” So you hop in the SUV in your Titan’s blue, but he’s wearing red, not because he knows the Titans are playing Kansas City, or cares, he just likes the way red makes him feel.

You get to the stadium and find your seats, and you say, “I’m going to get something to eat, you want anything?” It’s just a ploy to spend less quality time together, really. He says, “Yea, I’ll take an apple; make sure it’s organic, though.” You come back with a hot dog and a lot of beer, and the news that there is nothing organic in the whole stadium. “Really?”, he says. And you hope he might go off and investigate, but he just contemplates the thought that there’s “not an organic thing in the whole stadium.” Meanwhile! Fourth and a yard and the Titans go for it. “Holding! You must be kidding me! Did you see a hold there?”, you say accidentally to your brother-in-law. Who replies, “We are all holding on to something, don’t you think? It’s the first quarter and there’s not enough beer in the entire stadium.

Philosophy. Some scholars are thinking philosophy major when it comes to Bartimaeus. Why is that? Mark generally doesn’t give us the names of people who are healed by Jesus. Mark usually says, “A man,” “a woman,” “a man,” but this time there’s a name. Is there something in the name, Bartimaeus?

Well, “Bar” means “Son.” So his name is, literally, Son of Timaeus. Who is Timaeus? If you’re familiar with the dialogues of Plato, you know Timaeus to be one of the characters, a philosopher. A philosopher who praises, of all things, the ability to see. Timaeus, saying:

“Sight is the source of the greatest benefits to us.... God gave us the faculty of sight that we might behold the order of the heavens, and God created a corresponding order in our own

erring minds.” Timaeus espoused that the order of creation, the physical elements of the stars, are planted deep in our bones. Our very souls come from the stars, and our souls return to the stars if we live righteously. And living righteously was choosing reason over passion. Timaeus was on the best seller list at the time.

So it is that Bartimaeus may be Mark providing a little irony. He is the child of the philosophy of seeing, and yet he’s blind. He is the son of the philosophy of order and yet Bartimaeus’ life is a mess. He begs! He cries out, not to the heavens, but to Jesus. People tell him, “Shut up! Your need is disrupting my day!” He responds by crying ever more loudly. Jesus hears his call, and the crowd says, “Thank God! Take heart! He is calling you!”

Blind Bartimaeus throws off his cloak – some argue it’s a philosopher’s cloak – and he gets his eyesight back. But he’s different now. It’s a conversion story of such, I think. Imagine Bartimaeus getting his eyesight back and getting back to life as usual. He can’t go back to teaching philosophy. “Lesson two is about discovering the stardust is in your bones. And you have a little bit of the heavens in you. You just need to live into the righteous order of the heavens that is already inside each and every one of you and you will find the reward of the heavens.” He couldn’t go back that schlock, not anymore. Not after seeing the way of Jesus. He sees it as darkness and now he sees the light. He’s changed his own thinking, his own reasoning, his own living. It’s not about the order, it’s about following Christ into the chaos, and there’s plenty of chaos in this world.

What is seen cannot be unseen. There are things that are imprinted in our consciousness. We think of soldiers suffering with PTSD. Those things can be dark. What is seen cannot be unseen.

I’m reminded of Kevin Carter, the photographer who won a Pulitzer prize for a photograph he took of a Sudanese toddler, an emaciated girl collapsing in the foreground while in the background a plump vulture lurked, just waiting.

The photograph was so strong that it came with a note to let everyone know that the photographer chased the vulture away, and the young toddler made it to the feeding center. Weeks after receiving the Pulitzer for that very photo, the photographer took his own life. Afterward, a friend said, “Kevin always carried around the horror of the work he did.” He carries a picture of his friend in his head of Kevin sitting under a tree “smoking cigarettes one after another and crying.” What is seen, cannot be unseen.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/29/world/kevin-carter-a-pulitzer-winner-for-sudan-photo-is-dead-at-33.html>

We think that in terms of darkness, we all need a conversion of sorts, and I believe that photograph was a conversion for so many. The hope of the light came in, money came in, food came in, help came in. It prompted us to see that we’re not in this for our own bones, our own righteousness, our own self. We’re in this world together. What is seen cannot be unseen.

That is true of Jesus. He could have stayed in the safety in the order of the heavens. But he moved out of the safety his zip code. Jesus did not count equality with God as something to be grasped, but he emptied himself, heading into the darkness to provide the light. I know it is true in my life of this Gospel, that once you see it, it just stays with you. You can’t unsee it. What is seen, cannot be unseen.

I have been alive on this earth 21,427 days. That’s a lot of days. I’ve seen a lot of things. But sometimes what is seen cannot be unseen. What popped into my mind, oddly enough, was a moment in time about a mango in Jamaica. It was just one of those things in the 21,4276 days in which we lived, but it was with a youth group building a house in Jamaica for a

woman who had nothing. As we rested, I happened to look up into a tree that had hardly any leaves, and just one thing hanging. What's that?", I said. The woman motioned to her son to retrieve it, and he opened it up and handed it to her. It was the last mango on the tree. I can still see her peeling and cutting it into slices, the kids all gathered around her, and she shared with us the taste of fresh mango. She had nothing, but she had this smile on her face that said she had everything. Isn't it odd to think about a mango?

Somewhere, back in my days, that's what I remember, and it can't be unseen. And this is what it's about – when you see the Christ in front of you, you can't go back to the way it was. You can't go back to the darkness. You travel a long the way to the cross, amidst the chaos, but you know that there is light.

You heard it from Room in the Inn. What do you do with a pandemic and homeless people? Do you just give up on them and save your own soul? No! Not this church! Thankfully, there are souls in this church who said, "No!" There is light in the darkness, and they took the risk, stayed the night, made the casseroles, and continued the ministry because we cannot go back in the darkness.

When you see the glory in the cross, all the love, then you see and know what to do. Choose this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

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