

20 Pentecost 2003  
"Give Light to My Eyes"  
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It's unusual for all our lectionary readings to talk about the same theme. This morning they address a difficult human condition: blindness. Blindness. Now let me ask you, **How do you know when you are blind?** Think about it. You don't know. You only know *afterward*, when you can see.

I think our intelligence agencies have discovered that recently in their estimates of Saddam's weapons capability. They thought they knew, but were really blind to the reality. And they didn't know they were blind until they saw, on the ground, that - so far at least - there aren't the weapons of mass destruction. You don't know you are blind until afterward when you can see.

This is a very common problem. **Blindness is the inability to see what's right in front of you.** We all have it in one form or another and to one degree or another. They say love is blind. There's blind ambition. We all have our blind spots. We get blindsided from time to time. Some people suffer blinding pain. Then there's physical blindness, which isn't very common these days, but without glasses, do you feel "blind as a bat?"

There's also a sort of blindness in relationships, where we are so focused on our own needs and concerns and ideas and beliefs that we are blind to those of others. We all fool ourselves in some ways and are thus blind to the truth. There is also spiritual blindness, where people can't grasp the things of God.

Our Scripture readings this morning address this problem. They show us the nature of blindness AND it's cures. So let's take a look. We'll start with the Gospel, where Jesus heals a blind man. Picture it. The air is full of dust as Jesus and his gang pass through Jericho and a beggar named Bartimaeus.

He is begging because he's blind. He sees only darkness everywhere he turns. He can't work or defend himself and he can barely get from point A to point B. **He is completely dependent on the mercy, good will and generosity of others.**

He only has his voice to cry out for help from passersby. Brother can you spare a dime? But today, hearing the tramp of *many* feet, he senses something special passing by. Who's this? It's Jesus of Nazareth. Bartimaeus has heard of him before! He's heard great things. So he cries out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." He's heard that Jesus' mercy carries with it the power to heal and transform life. He wants it.

**So what's the cure for his blindness?** Jesus is. It's as simple and profound as that. Jesus heals him saying, "Your faith has made you well." He gives sight to

the blind. And as Bartimaeus sees the world around him he follows Jesus to Jerusalem.

Our Psalm reveals another kind of blindness, the blindness of depression. The Psalmist opens for us a window into his suffering. He is threatened by some enemy and in his fear he feels like the darkness is closing in around him. **The tunnel is getting darker, longer, and narrower.** The light at the end of it is fading. Do any of you know the feeling?

"How long, O Lord will you hide your face from me? How long shall I have perplexity in my mind and grief in my heart, day after day? ... Give light to my eyes, lest I sleep in death." He's blind to help and hope. It's all closing in on him with blinding force. He's unable to see outside his circumstances.

**So what's the cure for his blindness?** God throws him a lifeline. In the midst of the darkness and distress he's reminded of God's mercy and he takes a simple step. "I put my trust in your mercy." He can see enough to grasp it and hang on and that turns things around. "My heart is joyful because of your saving help.

Like Bartimaeus **all he can do is cry out for mercy and help to see.** "Give light to my eyes". And in that light he can see God in the midst of his trouble. He's able to praise God. "I will sing to the Lord, for he has dealt with me richly. I will praise the Name of the Lord Most High." There is such power in praising God. It turns on the light in the darkness and restores your soul.

The prophet Isaiah describes the state of Israel in a time of spiritual blindness. "We wait for the light and lo there is darkness, for brightness, but we walk in gloom. We grope like the blind along a wall, groping like those who have no eyes. We stumble at noon as in the twilight."

Why are they spiritually blind? He explains, "Your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. "

**Sin distorts our perceptions.** It makes it harder to see and understand God, to apprehend his truth, to know and do justice. Think of sin as a radical reordering of reality, taking what God says about the world and twisting it, reorienting it around us and our selfish interests.

Adam and Eve did it in the Garden, when they redefined the forbidden fruit. What God said would bring death, they convinced themselves would bring freedom and wisdom. And we all do it ourselves, creating our own little alternative realities and getting ourselves into some fine messes.

**So what's the cure for this blindness?** Isaiah shows the dramatic intervention of God. God arming himself and coming down to shake things up a little. And I

guess he does that through many means. That's especially the case when the blindness and evil gets to the point where it infects a whole society, as it did in Isaiah's day.

Our reading from Hebrews touches lightly on the theme of blindness. The author doesn't really talk about blindness per se, but focuses on the sharpness of our faculties of sight, our ability to see and discern.

He talks about those whose "faculties have been trained to distinguish good from evil." They have intentionally trained their **moral and spiritual perception to recognize good and evil**, true and false, genuine and counterfeit, light and dark. This is a *basic characteristic* of the mature disciple of Jesus.

In contrast is **the immature believer who is "unskilled in the word of righteousness."** What he's talking about? He's talking about folks who are unskilled in the use of Holy Scripture, who aren't knowledgeable of its contents, who don't have a vision of its important themes, a grasp of its various teachings and the ability to apply it faithfully to complex circumstances in life.

**So what's the cure for this blindness?** Mark shows us the kind of cure we like best, the instantaneous one. But Hebrews takes the long view. We must move on from immaturity as Christians to maturity. For him it's a life-long process of training the faculties to discern true and false. Or as he says at the end of our text, it takes "diligence to the very end". As in life, it is "through faith and patience" that we gain maturity and inherit the things God promises.

He's describing a process of Building Christians for Service, and in the months and years ahead we will be building into our curriculum for all ages this sort of training to skillfully use holy Scripture in a mature Christian life.

So, we've seen blindness, the physical blindness of Bartimaeus, the emotional blindness of the Psalmist, the spiritual blindness of Israel and the blindness of those who are unskilled in the word of righteousness.

I'd venture to say that **we are all share in this blindness** in certain ways and to certain degrees. And the scary thing about it is, by definition, we don't even know how we are blind. We won't know until afterward, in hindsight, when we can see. "Wow, I was really missing that!" We are all groping along the wall trying to understand ourselves, others, the world around us and trying to understand the ways of God. We often miss what is standing right in front of us. Like the CIA before the Iraq War, we don't know what we don't know.

And so we are in quite a state. But the good news is God helps us to see, and our texts this morning show us how. **We need that help.** And it starts with a very simple prayer, "HELP! Lord have mercy on me!" That's how Bartimaeus and the Psalmist prayed. Sometimes God heals instantly, but more often he throws a lifeline of hope into our darkness. Sometimes he puts on his armor and

intervenes dramatically, but usually it's a lifelong process of training our senses to see, through Holy Scripture. So that's blindness and it's cures.

**Let's pray.**

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; have mercy on us and heal our blindness, give light to our eyes that we might see you in all your majesty, truth and mercy, kindle in us a love of your holy Word and train us to be skilled in its use, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.