

Jim Gill

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“Seeing Jesus”

Job 42:1-6 Mark 10:46-52 Hebrews 7:23-28

INTRODUCTION TO JOB 42:1-6

The message of the book of Job is that there are indeed things that we will never know - at least in this life - things that are beyond our understanding. Our call is to not lose our faith in the face of them, not to begin foolishly blaming God for earthquakes or tsunamis or plane crashes or whatever befalls us.

Throughout the story of Job, despite all of the hardships and tragedies Job endured, Job is faithful to God. At the end of the story God affirms Job and restores even more than he had lost. These verses describe Job’s attitude at the end of his trials. Hear the word of the Lord from Job 42:1-6

INTRODUCTION TO MARK 10:46-52

Our gospel lesson tells the story of another man who was afflicted. This man had been able to see at one time in his life but was now forced to a life of begging by the road. Hear what happened when he heard that Jesus was about to pass by from the gospel of Mark 10:46-52.

Let’s pray. Open our eyes that we may see your truth. Open our ears to hear your voice. Open our minds to receive your Word. Open our hearts to feel your love. Open our souls to sense your touch. Open our hands to receive your gifts...especially the gift of your Holy Spirit to speak to us through this your word.

I read a story about an Ohio gentleman whose oil well caught fire, and he put out an all-points' bulletin for help, to make sure that anybody and everybody would come and help him. He offered a \$30,000 reward to whoever could put out that fire. With all the large firehouses from cities around sent help. They sent their best companies accompanied by the most modern fire- fighting equipment available, but not one of the trucks could get within 200 yards of the blaze because the heat was just too intense and the fire was too big.

Finally, the Calcutta Township Volunteer Fire Department appeared on the scene. Amazingly they had only one rickety truck equipped with a single ladder; only two buckets of water, three buckets of sand, and a few blankets. It didn't even come with a hose. When that old truck reached the point where all those other fire companies had stopped, the driver didn't even hesitate. He just kept barreling ahead until he and his crew were right in the thick of that blaze. They jumped out of that truck, threw the two buckets of water and three buckets of sand on that fire and then beat the fire out with those blankets.

That oil man was so impressed by that unbelievable display of courage, he gave the driver \$30,000 in cash on the spot and said, "What are you and your men

going to do with all of that money?" The driver, shaking like a leaf, said, "The first thing we're going to do is to get those stupid brakes on that truck fixed." 1

Theirs was an eye-opening experience. Bartimaeus had an eye-opening experience. When he heard that Jesus was coming he made sure that he would get a chance to meet him.

Throughout the three years of his public ministry Jesus healed many people. What's interesting is that we don't see a description of him healing any two people in the same way. Let's just take the healing of blind men for example.

In John 9:6, Jesus spat on the ground and made a mud pie and placed the mud on the man's eyes and told him to go wash it off in the pool of Siloam.

In Matthew 9:29 Jesus heals two blind men by just touching their eyes. There was no mud--just touch.

In Mark 8:22-26 Jesus had to pray for a man more than once. In this instance Jesus put his spit on the man's eyes (no mud) and prayed for him-- but he could only partially see. He said, "I see men, but they look like trees walking." Then Jesus simply touched his eyes a second time and prayed again and this time the man was able to see clearly. (There was the element of spit but no mud, plus a second touch.) This man was healed in stages. The man's sight did not perfectly return in an instant. It was an unfolding

So it is sometimes with our lives of becoming followers of Jesus. Sometimes we are able to see right away. Sometimes our vision unfolds, step by step. Some steps may give us a partial glimpse of a new vision of faith. Some steps may lead us to see something new or something old in a new way. Sometimes those steps are ordered by the one whom Jesus promised to send to be our teacher, the Holy Spirit.

In Luke 18:35, as well as our passage from Mark 10, Jesus was approaching Jericho and a man who used to be able to see but was now blind heard that Jesus was coming and asked Jesus to have mercy on him. Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me see again." Jesus said, "Receive your sight, your faith has saved you." (No spit. No mud. No touch. Only words—receive your sight your faith has saved you.)

So when it came to healing blind men, Jesus caused the first four denominations to be formed--the Mudites (You gotta have mud) the Touchites, (No you just gotta have touch but only two at a time) the Spittites (No you gotta have just spit but it takes a second touch) and the Faithites (No, You just gotta have faith.)

Augustine said, "Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of faith is to see what we believe." Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the assurance of things

hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Most of us in this room can see....some of us need assistance. (Hold up glasses). But can we also admit that there are some areas in which even though we can see we are still blind? Don't we all have blind spots? I'm driving a rental car for the moment and the side mirrors have a little yellow light that comes on when I am signaling to change lanes if there is someone in my blind spot. I have a friend who is blind. He works as a stand up comedian, as a voice over actor, and computer programmer. This is a T-shirt he sells at his concerts (Hold up T-shirt with a picture of a Dalmatian dog wearing sunglasses with the caption "My Blind Spot) In his stand up act he says, "I like to go to Gun Shows, pick up a rifle, and asks the salesman, "How much is it without the sight?" He says that he doesn't like to parachute because it scares the dog. He also says that he doesn't like to parachute because if you're blind and your parachute doesn't open he wouldn't know how far he was from the ground so he wouldn't know when his life should start passing before his eyes." What my friend lacks "in sight" he makes up for in "insight."

What are your blind spots? Are there things that blind you to spiritual things? Can we be so busy that we are blind to the things of God? Can we be so into personal ambition that we are blinded to what God wants us to do with our lives? Can we be focusing on material things so much that we are blind to what has genuine importance?

Helen Keller, who was so brave and inspiring to us in her deafness and blindness, once wrote a magazine article entitled: "Three days to see." In that article she outlined what things she would like to see if she were granted just three days of sight. On the first day she said she wanted to see friends. Day two she would spend seeing nature. The third day she would spend in her home city of New York watching the busy city and the workday of the present. She concluded it with these words: "I who am blind can give one hint to those who see: Use your eyes as if tomorrow you were stricken blind."

Those of you who use the D365 online devotional may be familiar with the instrumental music that is available to listen to as a part of the devotional. That music is composed for D365 by Ken Medema, a recording artist who plays and composes on the piano...who plays by ear... because he ... is blind.

As bad as blindness is in our century, however, it was so much worse in Jesus' day. Today a blind person at least has the hope of living a useful life with proper training. Some of the most skilled and creative people in our society are blind. But in first century Palestine blindness meant that you would be subjected to abject poverty. You would be reduced to begging for a living. You lived at the mercy and the generosity of others.

Little wonder then that one of the signs of the coming of the Messiah was that the blind should receive their sight. The first time Jesus was chosen to read the scrolls in his home synagogue he was handed the portion of Isaiah that began

with these words, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has sent me to recover sight to the blind."

On the night that Jesus rose from the dead he appeared to 10 of his disciples in the Upper Room. Thomas missed that meeting. For seven days the 10 tried to convince Thomas that they had seen the risen Lord. Do you remember what Thomas said for 7 days? He said, 'Unless I see the nail prints in his hands and the wound in his side I will not believe.'

A week later, when Jesus appeared again in the Upper Room Thomas was there. Even though he was a seeing person his faith was blind. When he saw Jesus he fell at his feet and said, "Lord, I believe." Jesus said to him, "Thomas you believe because you have seen? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

The Pharisee named Saul was a sighted person. He was on the Road to Damascus with a warrant to arrest and imprison followers of Jesus when the Jesus appeared to him and he was struck blind. In the other cases I have pointed out this morning Jesus helped blind men to see. In this case he made a seeing person blind. For 3 days Saul fasted and prayed until a man named Ananias came to him because the Lord told him to go. When Ananias prayed for Saul scales fell from his eyes and he could see again.

Saul became the Apostle Paul who went on to establish churches and who more than any other one person was instrumental in expanding the movement of Jesus followers to include Gentiles like many of us. Jesus made a seeing man blind to get his attention and then restored his sight so he could spend the rest of his life helping others so they too could be ... seeing Jesus.

Jesus didn't heal the same disease the same way. With one blind man he used spittle. With one he used mud. With two he used touch. With Bartimaeus he used words. With Saul he used a blinding light to heal a spiritually blind man and the prayers of a brave Ananias to not only restore Saul's physical sight but to heal his spiritual blindness. Jesus used different approaches but had the same results. They were different healings but the same calling-to follow Jesus.

Time and again he said to potential disciples, "Follow me." His wasn't a general sitting on a horse on a hill waving a sword and sending troops to charge forward...He was a leader calling folks to follow. He didn't ask anyone to go where he was not willing to go himself. Sometimes, like in the case of Bartimaeus, he didn't even have to ask. Did you notice the last verse of our passage? It said, "Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way."

Jesus didn't heal the same disease the same way, and Jesus doesn't deal with us in the same way. He doesn't reach us in the same way.

When it comes to our faith, we have many teachers. Some of us had parents who taught us the faith, who modeled the faith. We have pastors and Sunday School Teachers and Bible study teachers who have helped us to see Jesus.

Yesterday at the Men's Breakfast we heard once again about the Renewing Our Minds ministry of Tihomir Kukolja working in Croatia with refugees from twelve countries including Egypt, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Iran. His ministry is helping others to see Jesus.

This morning we are remembering those who blazed the trails for us, on those who saw to it that we too could be ... seeing Jesus. We have lit candles and heard the ringing of a bell and spoken names of those who have died and are now Bartimaeus and Paul who are ...seeing Jesus. They are in his presence. They are in the place he prepared for them and is preparing for us. Until we join them we must be content to be like Thomas...to be those who are blessed even though we have NOT seen and yet believe.

We have different gifts but the same calling—to use the gifts we've been given to bless others, to bless God and in so doing to experience the blessing of putting our gifts to work. We have different gifts but the Spirit equips us with those gifts, teaches how to use them and calls us to use them to not only bless others but to make more disciples. If the Spirit is working through us we will not only produce fruit that will result in more people becoming disciples, but also we will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit living in us--the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. We can even have some eye-opening experiences when we put our faith to work, when we are blessed especially when we have not seen ... and yet believe. We can put or faith to work by sharing what we have come to know from seeing Jesus work in our lives and who knows? Maybe someday someone will light a candle and ring a bell in our memory because we enabled them to be ones that are ... seeing Jesus.

Let's pray. Great are your words O God; You make our hearts glad. Wherever we look we see your goodness. Throughout history you have restored the fortunes of your people. In barren lands you led them to living waters. When they were hungry you sent manna to sustain them. Those who went forth weeping returned home with shouts of joy, recounting the benefits of your wonderful love.

We give thanks for Jesus, in whose name we inherit your mercy and confess anew our faith in him as our high priest. He bore our weaknesses in his body, and thereby made us strong. We give thanks that he lives among us today to encourage the fainthearted, empower the weak, comfort the lonely, and bring release to the captives and sight to the blind. Through him we are able to serve above and beyond our collective capacities and for that legacy we give you thanks.

We give thanks for your Holy Spirit who renews our flagging spirits and sends us forth with praise on our lips. In the midst of doubt, your Spirit brings clarity; when we are wary, your Spirit revives us. We can rely on your Spirit during lonely adventures; throughout our wandering we are never without your presence.

Our hearts beat with joy, thanks to your graciousness. Our eyes see more clearly, thanks to the vision of Jesus our Savior. Our whole selves move more freely, thanks to your indwelling Spirit.

Hear us as we pray for those on our hearts who are in need.

We continue to pray for the people in the places that have been devastated by flooding... Puerto Rico, The Carolinas. We pray for refugees searching for a place where they can live free from fear...especially for those we heard about yesterday in Croatia.

We are grateful that the pipe bombs that were sent did not explode and take any lives.

We pray for the survivors and the families of the victims of the shooting in the synagogue in Pittsburgh.

“On days like today when your chosen people are gunned down in your holy house we question everything we thought we knew about you, about humanity, about ourselves. How can such hate fester and plot, destroy and kill? How can those created in your image and called good commit such horrendous acts? How have we gotten to this place? Where do we go from here?

Lord, help us. Help us rise up and resist evil with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Help us confront the hate within and without that is overtaking our land. Comfort, O comfort your people, Lord. We beg for an outpouring of compassion and love to overwhelm the scourge of violence besetting our communities.

May we relentlessly speak up for and reach out to our Jewish brothers and sisters and all of those reeling in fear as they simply go about their daily living. Grant us the courage, the will and the stamina to live every day with faith, hope, mercy, kindness and justice until crying and mourning and death and hate are no more. We pray in the name of our Savior, a Jewish man from Nazareth, Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Amen.”²

Open our eyes, Lord. We want to see Jesus, to reach out and touch him

And say that we love him. Open our ears Lord and help us to listen

Open our eyes Lord. We want to see Jesus.

1. ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., ChristianGlobe Illustrations, by James Merritt
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