

Sermon 24 October 2021 - God our healer calls us from blindness to sight and out of darkness into the light of his Son.

Helen Keller, a well-known author – who many of you may have heard of - lost her sight and hearing after an illness at the age of nineteen months. She tells how one day she asked a friend “who had just returned from a long walk in the woods what she had seen.” And the friend replied, “nothing in particular.”

“How was this possible,” she asked herself, “when I, who cannot hear or see, find hundreds of things to interest me through mere touch.

I feel the delicate shape and design of a leaf.

I pass my hands lovingly over the rough bark of a pine tree.

Occasionally I place my hand quietly on a small tree, and if I’m lucky, feel the happy quiver of a bird in full song.”

This led her to conclude, **“The greatest calamity that can befall people, is not that they should be born blind, but that they should have eyes, yet fail to see.”**

One of the themes running through our readings today has to do with seeing or, the inability to see things clearly. We all see things from a particular perspective. A perspective that can sometimes blind us or prevent us from seeing and doing things differently. From living different lives. Our readings today encourage us to re-think our perceptions – the things we think we know and take for granted - and to see differently - with new vision and understanding. This is not easy and sometimes it is something we don’t really want to do because it means we must take a real hard and honest look at ourselves. Our habits, our pride, our expectations, our limitations and our understanding of God and God’s ways. Our blindness!

Over the past three weeks we have been listening to the painful and tragic story of Job. One that seems unfair. One that we can even relate to on different levels. One in which Job has been pleading with God for answers about his hardships and suffering. And to which he has received no answers. And then today, suddenly everything changes and, Job’s situation has a happy ending. His health, family and fortunes are restored. Now this “happy ending” is certainly not the case for everyone who experiences hardships. So, what then is the point of Job’s story? Well, what Job learns – finally sees/realises – is that God’s ways are not our ways. God is much greater than we can think or imagine. And so Job learns that he needs to humbly submit himself to God in faith and trust even though he

does not understand why his life's story unfolded in the way it did. This is something that happens to us too. We don't always understand why things happen to us. When God reveals himself to Job, everything changes for Job and his focus is no longer on his plight and the answers he seeks but on God's greatness. It is God's revelation of God's self that brings Job to a place of seeing the world and his place in it, in a new way. And it is this new way of knowing, this new way of seeing that leads him to confess: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5) And this is the lesson behind Job's story. That God does heal and restore but not necessarily in the way we want or expect. We too need to humbly submit to God in faith and trust irrespective of our circumstances.

The psalmist praises God for saving – rescuing - him from his troubles. He acknowledges that although the righteous suffer, God brings restoration. The psalmist too has suffered. But he has also experienced God's healing and restoration and so is able to say, "O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him" (Psalm 34: 8) Yes, happy are those who put their faith and trust in God. And this is something only someone who has had an encounter with God is able to testify to.

The writer to the Hebrews holds Jesus up for them (the Hebrews), and us, to see him as a priest like no other before. He did not come from the priestly tribe. He did not die as other priests did. He is different. He is holy and blameless not needing to offer sacrifices day after day, because he did this once for all when he offered himself. (Hebrews 7: 26-27). Is this how we see Jesus? Do we believe and trust that Jesus' self-offering brings us healing and restoration? Freedom from our situations of blindness to sight and darkness to light!

Our Gospel reading tells the familiar story of blind Bartimaeus sitting on the fringes of society begging. But when he hears that Jesus is nearby, he calls out to him: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" When Jesus stops and calls him, we are told that he throws off his coat, jumps up and goes to Jesus. This man, who is blind, throws off his coat – probably one of the few things he owned – a symbol of warmth and protection – and he jumps up and goes to Jesus. He takes a leap of faith – leaving his old life behind - unable to see where he is going. He does not know what lies ahead but he goes leaving behind everything he has and goes to Jesus. He responds in faith to Jesus' call. And when he gets to Jesus, we told Jesus asks him, **"What do you want me to do for you?"**

Pause for a minute. Why would Jesus ask this? Is it not obvious? To us maybe – especially when we hear Bartimaeus' response, "My teacher, let me see again." But Jesus does not take his need for granted. He respects Bartimaeus and wants him to name his request – to voice his need.

How often do we decide for others what they need based on what we see – on our perceptions – of their lives and circumstances? Are we so blinded by our arrogance, self-righteousness, prejudice, that we are unable to afford them the respect of being able to name their need and the help they seek? Do we only "see" with our eyes, superficially, distracted by everything that is on our plate? Or do we consciously seek to "see" with the insight of our minds, with the vision of our imagination, with the love, understanding and compassion of our hearts? Not only for others but for ourselves as well.

The healing of blind Bartimaeus is a story about more than just healing/restoration from physical blindness to sight? It is in fact a call to follow Jesus. At the end of the passage we are told that Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the way. His life is restored. As a blind beggar he was most probably excluded from society – now he is restored and accepted again. God calls each one of us too - out of darkness into the light of his Son. Bartimaeus believed that Jesus could heal him. And so it can be for us too. It is through faith that our eyes are opened to a new vision of God's action in our world and in our lives. This is what Job had to learn, what the psalmist encourages us to do and what Bartimaeus did. This is God's call to each one of us – to see not only with our eyes but with our hearts and minds as well.

"The greatest calamity that can befall people, is not that they should be born blind, but that they should have eyes, yet fail to see." (Helen Keller)

Let us pray

Jesus open our eyes to see you – to your mercy and goodness. Help us to respond to your call. Your call to follow you. To receive the salvation you offer to all who come to God in faith and trust.

Amen