

LEARNING TO SEE
Job 42: 1-6, 10-17; Mark 10: 46-52
Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time • October 24, 2021
by Pat Berger

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked Bartimaeus. Did you notice: that is the same question he asked in our reading last week when James and John came to him, wanting him to do for them whatever they asked. My guess is, Jesus may have asked that question often. Bartimaeus' story is a bit different from James and John's story. He was sitting beside the road, a blind man begging for whatever people might throw his way. He was not deaf, though, and this day he heard a commotion and a large group of people going past him. And then he heard that it was Jesus who was going by, and he began to shout out. Others told him to be still, but that only made him cry out more loudly. "Jesus! Son of David!" -- no one had called Jesus that before -- "Have mercy on me!" Jesus heard him, and asked that the man be brought to him.

Bartimaeus "sprang up," we are told -- a man wouldn't do that in that time (not dignified . . .). But he sprang up, and went to Jesus. He threw off his cloak, we are told. Commentator Dr. Eugene Borng wrote that Bartimaeus' throwing off his cloak is "but a further indication that this is a call/discipleship story. The mantle in which he slept and which he spread before him beside the road to collect alms seems to be his sole possession and means of his livelihood; his casting it away corresponds to the other disciples leaving their boats, their tax desks, and 'everything.'" This new vision reorients Bartimaeus' entire life; nothing was as it had been before. This newest disciple was on the way, just as the way led to Jerusalem. And then the question: "What do you want me to do for you?"

Here the story takes a different turn from the one last week. Bartimaeus said, "My teacher," -- perhaps he could see better than he or anyone knew -- "My teacher, let me see again." We aren't told how he lost his vision, but it is easy for us to imagine how difficult life would have been for him as a person who was blind. Begging beside the road might have been the only way for him even to exist. And then he said, "My teacher" -- he knew who Jesus was before he even followed. "Go," Jesus said (as he said after each of his healings), "Your faith has made you well." Bartimaeus did go, but he didn't go away; he went with Jesus, he followed Jesus and the other followers on their way to Jerusalem.

Job, too, had been having trouble seeing in the readings we have heard in the past few weeks. His trouble, however, wasn't with physically seeing; by anything that we can determine, his vision seemed to be just fine. At the first of our time in Job, it seemed that everything was just fine with Job -- he was blameless and upright, righteous and one who feared God and turned away from evil. And then. God gave the Satan permission to have his way with Job, only sparing his

life; Job's family died, and his animals, his land was taken away; finally, Job requested a meeting with God. If only God would listen to his troubles, Job was sure that God would straighten everything around. God listened, for sure, and then it was Job's turn to listen. And as we remember from last week, it was quite the lecture. It was spoken to Job, but was about the whole of creation. "Look at all that I have created, just as I created you," Job heard. God did not dismiss Job, but did make sure that Job understood his place in the whole.

In today's verses, we hear not only that Job's circumstances have changed, but also that Job himself has changed. In verse 5, Job said to God, "I had heard of you be the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;" -- Job had been enabled to see, much as had Bartimaeus in the Mark reading. Job had heard about God, and had believed what he heard and lived his life accordingly. But we all know that there is a difference between knowing something in one's head, and really seeing whatever it is at work and then knowing it in one's heart. Job's suffering had not ended yet, by the first of the reading that Gina read for us, and still Job's transformation had begun. One of the commentators wrote that it was Job's awareness of God's presence that was the agent of transformation.

The last verses of today's reading, where it is related that Job ended his very long life with many animals and more children, are likely a later addition to the book. New animals and new children do not replace those who have been lost; they make for a happier ending, and were likely written to link the book to the book of Psalms. These verses confirm Job's transformation, the fact that he had learned to see, rather than adding to his transformation.

We, too, can learn to see. We may or may not have a dramatic call story, and yet we have encounters with Jesus, with the holy. Perhaps these encounters cause us to take heart in a difficult time, or to have a change of heart when we might not have realized that we needed that change. What do we do with that? The Psalm that goes with today's readings, Psalm 34, says, "I will Bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth." When we share our experiences, we may be one who helps another on the path to learning to see. We can't give our sight to others, one writer put it, but we can share what we see. How have you seen God's creative love at work in your world this week? We live in interesting times. The pandemic seems to change every day or two, as do the rules for dealing with it. Those in positions of power have difficulties getting along with each other, impacting their capacity to enact legislation. Jobs and paying for life's basics continue to be at the tops of too many lists. And yet. We may not see big events, but even the smallest gesture may be huge to the one who receives it, and cause him or her to see, and to be able to praise God at all times. May it ever be so.

Let us pray.

