



I am so pleased to feel better this week, after last Sunday's attack of vertigo. Did I say anything crazier than usual?

Can anyone tell me what it says on the bulletin board on the left wall (as you are walking towards the back entrance), halfway down the main hallway of the church? *Jesus Loves All Children of the World*. I thought about that bulletin board a couple of times this week, because of a song I heard on the radio. Does anyone remember the singer Ray Stevens? Several times in the past week or two I've heard what is arguably his best and most well-known song, *Everything Is Beautiful*. I like the way he starts the song with the words to *Jesus Loves the Little Children* –

*Jesus loves the little children
All the little children of the world
Red and yellow, black and white
They are precious in his sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world*

And then he goes into the first verse of the song –

*Everything is beautiful
In its own way
Like a starry summer night
Or a snow covered winter's day
Everybody's beautiful
In their own way
Under God's heaven
The world's gonna find a way*

And the next line contains some great truth, and is a variation on a line that dates to centuries ago –

*There is none so blind...can anyone finish the line?
As he who will not see
—Everything Is Beautiful, by Ray Stevens.*

In that line, Stevens reminds us that there is more than one kind of blindness. There is physical blindness, certainly, but there is also spiritual blindness, which inflicts far more people than does

physical blindness.

As we continue our series of messages titled *The Road to Jerusalem*, this week our text tells us of a blind man who, in spite of his inability to physically see, possessed a depth of insight that was not available to many people who possessed very keen eyesight.

Follow along with me, please, as I read our Scripture text for this morning –

35 *As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.*

36 *When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening.*

37 *They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”*

38 *He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

39 *Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

40 *Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him,*

41 *“What do you want me to do for you?”*

“Lord, I want to see,” he replied.

42 *Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.”*

43 *Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God*

There are several fascinating elements in this passage that I want to speak to this morning. They are elements that are more fascinating, more interesting, and more exciting than March Madness, which we are in the midst of –

1. Even those closest to Jesus don't always understand him.

As the text begins, Jesus had begun his journey to Jerusalem, a journey that would culminate in his crucifixion and resurrection. In Luke 18:31-33 we read that *Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.* I can't imagine how Jesus could be any more blunt than that, but in the next verse Luke tells us that *the disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.* How could they not understand what Jesus was saying? How much more obvious could he be?

Sometimes the disciples couldn't see what was right in front of them. It is also, let us be honest, true of us as well. Sometimes, we don't see – or perhaps we don't want to see – what God puts right in front of us. We all have our blind spots (and even being aware of our blind spots is difficult, because they are, after all *blind spots*, which means we are unaware of them. If we were aware of them, they wouldn't be called *blind spots*). All of us – yes, all of us – are blind to some truths. We are blind knowingly or unknowingly, but we are blind nonetheless.

Perhaps one of the ways in which we are blind is in not taking the time or care to note what is happening in the lives of others. The crowd might have, for instance, been willingly blind to the man as he begged. To be honest, don't we sometimes want to look past some needs? It's complicated to be drawn into the lives of others. Sometimes, it's overwhelming. Working with people is complicated and overwhelming, so it's a natural tendency to want to, as we say, *turn a blind eye* to what is around us.

2. The cry for mercy must be our cry as well.

Listen again to verses 38 and 39 – **38** *He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*
39 *Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

Who in the world would rebuke a man who was blind, a man simply crying out for mercy? Does it seem odd that someone seeking help would find rebuke? All he is doing is looking for help, which makes it the height of absurdity that someone would be rebuked for doing what is totally natural, which is to search for help! Jesus was passing by, and the fame of Jesus was such that the man could hope that, perhaps, Jesus would heal him. So who wouldn't cry out for mercy in such a situation? Wouldn't we all? Wouldn't that be the logical reaction? If it meant we could find some help, of course we would! And who would fault us for doing so? Telling someone not to cry out to Jesus for mercy would be like telling someone in church not to pray! Imagine! *Jim, don't pray!* It feels wrong even using it as an example!

Well, the man was rebuked, simply for seeking help from Jesus. And take note of who it was who rebuked him – *those who led the way!* What kind of leaders were they! This points to the importance of example. If a leader can't lead by example they ought to get out of the way. Just get out of the way! People will model what they see, for good or ill, and leaders have the responsibility to provide an example of compassion and care, whether they are religious leaders, political leaders, community leaders, or wherever you find leaders.

Maybe these leaders didn't like the blind man calling attention to the fact that there were people in their midst who had very grave needs. Perhaps they wanted to cover up those needs because it looked bad for them. Maybe they thought it was bad for business for the blind man to call out. Maybe it made them feel uncomfortable. And maybe it reminded them that they too stood in need of mercy, and perhaps they didn't want to admit to that.

I remember traveling to a city some years ago for a large convention and in the days leading up to the convention the city cleared the streets of homeless people. They wanted them out of sight because they didn't want any of the visitors to see the needs in that city. Well, we're sorry that human need is sometimes inconvenient to the powers that be. The care of people with great physical needs is often sacrificed on the altar of political expediency; sometimes, it's simply an easy target, because the recipients don't have much of a political voice and don't always have a political champion. Sometimes it is said that the care of the poor is the responsibility of churches. I think that's true, but maybe that's a convenient excuse. I happen to think there is a place for government, especially with the resources on hand for the government, and I believe that is a way in which God works as well. And certainly, if we say we live in a Christian nation shouldn't then our nation act in a Christian manner?

We are called to be mercy providers. Being merciful isn't simple though, is it, and because it's not simple it's easy to say things such as *they're just out to scam everyone*. Yes, some do. We deal with that here on a regular basis. We do our best and try to be careful but we get taken sometimes, and if we do, we do; that's not on us. But honestly, if I were desperate, what might I do? It's easy to be righteous when life is pretty good, but what if I had been raised in grinding poverty? It's easy to be righteous when I grew up in a good home, but what if I grew up in a terrible dysfunctional, abusive home? It's easy to be righteous when I grew up in a home where all my needs were met, but what if I were desperate to take care of my family? What might I do?

There are voices crying out, and those voices cannot be silenced. The crowd could not stop the voice of this blind man, and nothing will stop the crowds of people who cry out and beg for mercy. Just as when the religious leaders told Jesus to silence the crowds at the Triumphal Entry and his reply was *I tell you...if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out* (Luke 19:40). Jesus stopped what he was doing. He might have been teaching his disciples as he walked along, but whatever he was doing, he stopped out of response to the need of this blind man. There are so many desperate voices crying out, and they must be heard.

The man knew to ask for mercy. We all need mercy. Sometimes we are the blind man, crying out to God. It might not be blindness, but it's something. We all have something, at some time, that leads us to cry out to God.

And isn't it a wonderful gift to receive mercy? We all need to receive mercy at times, regardless of who we are and regardless of our station in life. The mercy of God often comes through other people, and I am grateful to receive that mercy, and much of it comes from you. It is that mercy that keeps me going and I consider you saints for offering it.

3. *Jesus healed a blind man, opening his eyes, and he wants to open our eyes as well.*

Sometimes, we just don't see. Sometimes, it's fear that keeps us from being able to see. Sometimes, we are so afraid of a change in viewpoint, a change in thinking, or a change in living that we close our eyes. Maybe it's a hard heart. It could be many things.

What Jesus wants to do is to open our eyes, just as he did the blind man. We might have great eyesight, but every one of us needs our eyes opened to something, and that's what Jesus seeks to do for us.

A number of years ago there was a commercial for a luxury car that I found very interesting. Two young men were backpacking through the countryside, perhaps somewhere in Europe or here in the states. By appearances, they carried to be carrying a few meager possessions with them, and seemed to be determined to live simple, humble lives. One was talking excitedly about his plan to major in pottery and devote his life to his art, content to make a meager living from his work. Suddenly, on the horizon, a beautiful luxury car appears and they put out their thumbs in hope of getting a ride. The driver pulls over and the two young men get into the back seat of the car. The young man who was talking about pottery was obviously impressed by the beauty and luxury of the car. He ran his hand lovingly over the leather seat and cast an impressed eye at the high-tech dashboard. Overcome by the luxury of the car he said, *I can always minor in pottery*. Boom! In a single moment his entire worldview is reoriented. In a moment he went from a lifetime dedicated to his art and living a simple life to the desire for luxury and, presumably, pursuing the wealth it would take to obtain such a life.

By the healing action of Jesus, the life of the blind man was changed in a single moment. From blindness to sight, the man received the tremendous blessing of healing as his sight was restored. For the crowd, it was a moment to be amazed by the healing power of Jesus, but it was also a teachable moment. How many in the crowd understood what Jesus sought to teach, however, is unknown to us. Some, surely, had the spiritual sight restored; others, presumably, remained in their blindness.

As we continue to travel The Road to Jerusalem with Jesus, may our prayer be that we will allow Jesus to open our eyes, because there is none so blind, as he who will not see.