

St. Bride's Church of Scotland, Newtonmore

Rev. Catherine Buchan

ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS – BLIND MAN

21st February 2016

Psalm 25:1-10

Luke 18:31-43

Once upon a time there was a man who could not see. He was blind. However, he knew his environment well. He could negotiate his way around his home and his local area without help. He knew where everything was. One day he left his home and walked along the street which his feet knew so well. He stepped up on the pavement, he stepped down again and crossed the road, when he could hear that nothing was coming, and he stepped up again – and fell flat on his face, because someone had come since last he was out and had removed that pavement, so that when he stepped up there was nothing to bear his weight and as his foot fell lower than expected he lost his balance. He pulled himself up and wondered what to do. Suddenly the familiar was beset with problems, because he could not tell just where he was now, or what other changes there might have been. Suddenly, with one small change, what was familiar had become strange and dangerous and the man knew that he needed a guide in this familiar but unfamiliar territory. He needed to know where he was and what might prevent him getting to the shop he was heading for, and how he would get home again.

Sometimes in life you really have to spell things out. There are times when the thing on your mind, the thing that you want to happen, just the thing that you want, is too important to trust that someone else will realise and make it happen for you. Sometimes it is too important just to hint and hope for the best. Like when you go to the doctor with a lump which is on your body and on your mind. Like the time that the blind man heard Jesus was coming his way. He knew what he wanted to ask Jesus, because knew what he was missing, or at least that he was missing something. So he asked for what he knew he lacked. He asked to be able to see.

It took courage. It took making a fuss when people didn't want him to make a fuss. It meant drawing attention to his need and his lack, which is never an easy thing to do. Everyone could see what he lacked, but no one else seems to have thought of bringing him to Jesus, in fact they tried to keep him in the background. When there are people who have obvious difficulties, like this blind man, the rest of society often expect them to be accepting of it, to rationalise and say things like, "Well, I am blind, but that mans that I am never disappointed in what I see. I will never watch my face or the faces of friends grow older and more wrinkled. I may never know what you rave over when you exclaim over a sunrise or a sunset, but then I will appreciate the coolness of a grey cloudy day without lamenting the loss of the sun." We call this making the best of a bad job and we pride ourselves on it, at times. But what if the blind person wants to see? What if the best we want to make of a bad job is to make it better?

There are times when we do have to make the best of our imperfections, but there are times too when we should be asking God to give us what we lack. Especially when

what we lack is sight, and insight. If the blind man lacked sight, the disciples lacked insight.

How do you know that you can't see? In physical terms you must learn it fairly quickly since everyone around you is reacting to the world in a different way than you are. I knew I had bad eyes, and the optician confirmed it, but I knew how practically bad they were when I tried to get the wrong man to leave the swimming pool, instead of my husband! Of course some blind people have lost their sight, and know full well what they're missing, even if you don't always realise when your sight is beginning to get less acute at first.

The blind man knew what he needed. If he was blind from birth, and in this instance we are not told, then he would not know what he had never seen. But he knew that there was something. There was something he was not a part of, and he wanted it, he wanted to experience the world in as full a way as possible. So he asked. And asking, he received.

However, those blind from birth don't really know what they are missing, and if they are given sight there are always lots of surprises for them, and in that they are in the position of the disciples on the road with Jesus. They did not know what they were missing. They heard these words which he spoke, and they had no idea that they were not understanding what Jesus meant.

Sarah has spoken to us about the work she will be doing in Afghanistan. She knows a fair bit about what to expect, but not everything. Even if she were never to leave home, she would not know everything about what would happen! None of us do. But she knows that in many instances she will be working among people who know what they need and who ask for it. Healthcare, sanitation, education, commerce, they will ask for it, for help achieving it. Asking is good. Asking names our needs. Sometimes, we are just too sophisticated, and don't ask, don't ask each other, don't ask God.

There is a message in our reading for those of us who labour under the conviction that there is more to the Christian faith than we have yet discovered. There are those, and you might be among them, who live afraid that the faith they see other Christians live out is at a different level than their own. They are afraid that they are missing a depth in their knowledge of God, or that there are experiences of God's Spirit which might help them live their faith better, only they have never known them. If this is you, and this feeling can be found in the most unexpected places, then the lesson we have here is to ask. You need to ask God about it. Not just in a general way, but specifically. The blind man did not say "Can you make my life fuller?" He did not say "If you can help me in any way, that would be appreciated." And he did not sit quietly, hoping that Jesus would notice him. He made a noise, and even when the people around him told him to be quiet, he would not shut up. There are some of us who need to be as outspoken and specific in our prayers as this man was. We need to ask and go on asking for what it is we want, what blindness we would be rid of, for the ability to see clearly, to know God, to have faith.

Like the blind man, the disciples did not see; they knew that they were on the road to Jerusalem, but they did not understand that they were on the road to Jerusalem with a prophetic purpose. They could not take it in, but they did not realise that they were not taking it in, that they were missing the message, missing the point of what Jesus's

message was about. It is hard for us to realise what we do not understand, what we don't see.

And what if you don't know what it is you don't know, like the disciples? What was it Donald Rumsfeld famously, and obscurely said? "*There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know.*" What then? The answer is the same: ask for it.

How can you ask for what you don't know, you may wonder? But in our life with God, if there is one thing we can be sure of, it is that we all have areas of blindness. And no, we can't always know what they are. Sometimes we may, like the disciples, think that we understand perfectly. But it is worth asking God to check. The disciples didn't check with Jesus. They didn't ask him which which of the prophecies he was referring to, did not ask him to explain the scriptures to them.

Later, much later, after the resurrection, he would meet two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and explain the scriptures to them. Why had they never asked him to do this before? This was not the only time that he told them of his coming death and linked it to Scripture. Why didn't they ask him to tell them more? Was it not because they thought that they understood? They thought he was speaking in pictures, not literally. Was it only when the crucifixion shattered their easy, comfortable assumptions that they were ready to listen to what Jesus had to tell them about the scriptures and himself?

The blind man was in desperate straits, he really wanted to see. After the crucifixion when the disciples had had their world turned on its head, they wanted to see. It often is when we are in real difficulty, physical or emotional or intellectual, that we suddenly know what it is that we need. And that is when we should ask for it. Not in general terms, not pussy-footing about. Sometimes it is good for us to know what we need and to say it. Of course Jesus could see that the blind man was blind, but all the same he asked him what he wanted. It was good for the blind man to face up to his lack and name it. It is good for us to face up to our lack, whatever it is, and there is always something, and name it before God.

In this week of our Lenten journey to the Cross and beyond, let us take time to name our needs before God, and also to ask him to help us see where we lack sight and insight. Amen