

Sermon by the Reverend Hope Eakins  
St. John's Episcopal Church, West Hartford, CT  
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Proper 25, Year B

"My teacher, let me see again."

Imagine for a minute that as you leave St. John's this morning you see a blind beggar seated on the ground. He cries out to you, "What goes on in that church? What do you do in there? Tell me what happens inside." "Well," you might say, "we sing hymns and say prayers." Or if you were a little more bold, you might venture to add, "Well, because **our** faith is weak, we come to get strength from each other." Or in a flight of theological metaphor, you might say, "We come to be fed by our God, to be fed with God's word when human words can not answer life's questions, to be fed by God's sacraments when the food of the world cannot satisfy our hunger." One of you might reply, "I come to confess my sin and to be assured of God's pardon." But I don't think any of us would say, even though we have some ophthalmologists in our congregation, I don't think any of us would say, "We come here to have our eyes checked." Yet I think that like blind Bartimaeus in the Gospel that is what we really do each Sunday. We come to get a fresh vision, a different outlook, to see with new eyes, to see ourselves not as sinners alone, but as redeemed sinners, to see the signs of God's kingdom all around us, to discover how and where we are called to serve, and every once in a while to catch a glimpse of God.

If things are just fine the way they are, if neither we nor our world needs blessing and healing, then we might as well stay home and read the Sunday papers. But when we see that things are not fine just the way they are, then like blind Bartimaeus we come here to call out to God, "Let me see again." And we come with a fragile faith that our cry will be heard and our eyes opened.

What would we see then? Let me tell you some things that I have seen here recently. I have seen our young people fairly bubble over with stories of their mission trip to the Dominican Republic. They had their eyes opened to see poverty and what they could do about it; they saw our church at work in a mission field and were a part of it all. Why did they have this opportunity to serve and to grow? Because you gave your money to support our youth program, because a newlywed parish couple decided to spend their honeymoon chaperoning our kids.

I have seen one of our pilgrims to the Holy Land return home and make a big change in her life. For ten years this woman has been saving the letters sent her by an angry neighbor, holding onto them as documentation of the neighbor's crazy ranting. But her eyes were opened at the places where our Lord went about healing and teaching, so she put all those letters through a paper shredder and she is moving on.

I have seen a woman who was bitterly opposed to gay marriage open her Bible to find the place where Jesus says marriage is only between a man and a woman. But she couldn't find it anyplace, and as she searched, somehow she came to find Jesus saying that where there is Love, love of all kinds, there is God. And she is surprised to find her heart changing.

One way or another, all these folks prayed like blind Bartimaeus, "Lord, let me see again," and risked looking for an answer. For when God gives us new vision, God turns the world upside down or at least turns us upside down so that what has grown old is being made new and things start to look different, and we can no longer be so comfortable resting on our old assumptions.

Ten people have died in a shooting rampage in a Pittsburgh synagogue. I can no longer be comfortable with gun laws that allow felons and abusers and the mentally ill to bear arms, or with laws that allow bump stocks to speed up the rate of shooting so that lots more people can be killed lots more quickly. I can no longer believe that the gun lobby cares at all about protecting my Constitutional rights when it seems blatantly clear that what they are protecting is their own profit margin.

Lord, let me see again. We all need new eyes. We need the courage to look within ourselves, to look with faith unclouded by fear. How many of us are haunted by something in the past, some sin, some omission, some pain that keeps us blinded to the forgiveness and joy and glory of God that might be ours? How many of us look backward and see through cataracts of vengeance or jealousy or bitterness of heart? How many of us are missing out on a new beginning because we can't risk taking the first step?

It has been my experience and I'll bet you have had it too. A friend is lonely and depressed and you want to help him so you say, "Well, you could come to dinner at our house on Saturday ..." and he says, "No, Saturday's going to be a hard day, and I will be tired." And you say, "Well, the Christmas Fair needs help with setting up; you could come with us and lend a hand." And he says, "Well, I have a dust allergy and I'm afraid I'll start sneezing if I sort old books." And you offer suggestion after suggestion for new life and new possibility and he tells you why your possibilities are his dead ends.

We all get stuck in ruts of sin, or in ruts of old habits, sitting by the dusty roadside, begging like blind Bartimaeus, scared to trust God until - until something stirs in the air and the people of faith around us tell us that Jesus is about to walk by. And sometimes, even knowing that, we are afraid to call out and ask for help, stuck in our blindness for lots of reasons - maybe because at least the pain we suffer is familiar, or maybe because sometimes people really do have pity on beggars, or maybe because we think that not much is really expected of blind people anyway. And so we stay by the side of the road, and the words, "Lord, let me see again" get stuck in our throats, and we get stuck too, unable to ask for help, unwilling to open our eyes.

Lord let me see again! I think it is interesting that Bartimaeus adds "again" to his prayer. The word is often interpreted to mean that the beggar's blindness was not congenital but acquired, but I think it means far more than that. Let me see AGAIN! We all have a vision, a dream, a hope. Deep in our blindness is the promise that we are blessed, the remembrance that we have been blessed, that God is always with us, redeeming us and healing us with perfect love. Let me see again! The beggar pleads with Jesus to restore his vision, to open his eyes so that he can find what he has lost.

I recently visited two people who are sick. The first has dementia which has progressed with frightening speed. The good thing about his memory loss is that he doesn't remember anything that troubles him, but the bad thing about his destroyed memory is that he cannot remember the things that would sustain and comfort him. He can't remember what he once saw, so we must tell him the old old story and beg for him, "Lord, let him see again!"

The second person was near death. When I asked him if he were afraid of dying, first he quipped, "Not really, because I haven't tried it yet." And then as he held the hands of his wife and children, he began to plan his funeral. Tears ran down the faces of his family, but his eyes were clear. "I have seen heaven," he said, "I had a vision of where I am going," and we did not know what he had seen, but his vision gave us all vision, a vision of new faith, palpable faith in God's promise of life without fear.

Maybe that is the answer then to the hypothetical beggar in the parking lot - we go to church because we want to see more clearly with the eyes of faith, because we are all beggars, praying, "Lord, let me see again."

This is the time of the year when you are being asked to pledge your support to St. John's. Before you decide to raise your pledge or to cut your pledge or just give the same old thing, I beg you to take two minutes to pray like Bartimaeus, "Lord, let me see again," and then be silent and wait to see again what St. John's means to you and how much St. John's depends upon you. And perhaps, you too will hear Jesus call you to follow him. And perhaps you will answer his call with your eyes newly opened.

This is also the time of the year when we get to take our place as voters in this great country. May we, like the blind beggar, beg God to open our eyes to consider the candidates with clear vision and choose leaders who will guide us to God's Kingdom of justice and peace.