

## April 7

### We Want To See

Luke 18:35-19:10

Jesus is going to Jerusalem and is nearly there. Next Sunday we celebrate his arrival and the beginning of the most climatic week the world has ever experienced. The stories that we heard today in our scripture reading happened in Jericho. Jericho is located at the north end of the Dead Sea and is on the main route for those traveling to Jerusalem from the north. Samaria lays between Galilee and Jerusalem and rarely did people want to cross those, often inhospitable, lands. In Luke, just before our scripture, Jesus again announces his upcoming death and resurrection. After three years, the disciples still didn't "get" the meaning of Jesus' words about dying and rising. Luke seems to be portraying them as spiritually blind. This will be in contrast with the man who is blind and Zacchaeus, who was spiritually blind but in an instance sees, with more clarity than the disciples, Jesus - who he was and his message. We need to hear the implied warning before we go on. We can be like those disciples. We become blind to what Jesus says and offers, while others who are blind by our standards, may, at least in the moment, see and understand Jesus better than we.

It is hard not to make comparisons between the story of the healing of the blind man and the parable of the Good Samaritan that Jesus shared just a few chapters ago in Luke. In the parable there is a man on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. He is robbed, beaten and left for dead. Along the road come religious people who pass him by. Finally a Samaritan comes, takes pity on him, and takes care of him. Another day we will talk about why these religious people may have acted as they did. Today we learn about a blind man needing help, calling out for mercy. Most ignored him and his pleas. They pass by him, not taking time to help, just like the religious people in the parable. Jesus, however, stopped and called for him to be brought to him. Jesus, Luke seems to be saying, lived out the story of being a good neighbor. Luke reminds us through these events how easy it is to pass by someone in need because it is inconvenient.

The question Jesus asked the blind man seems strange. He asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" The man promptly and clearly identified the need he felt. He

wanted to see. It seems that it is important, sometimes, to name our need, to identify where we are struggling and to ask God to help us.

Now I want you to put yourself into this story. Imagine Jesus asking you that question. What need(s) do you sense most clearly that you have today? Do you need to be healed of discouragement? Do you need comfort because of blinding grief? Do you need other forms of healing? This isn't about all of those concerns we carry around with us for others. This is about what we need. Could you answer that question today if Jesus were to ask you what you need? Even more, do you have the faith of that man born blind? Do you believe Jesus has the ability to help you, heal you of that need?

It is hard to have this much faith and trust. I have people come to talk with me on almost a weekly basis about the big stuff happening in their lives. They have heard a medical diagnosis that tell them they have a limited time left or they are beginning a long journey with a debilitating disease. They come because family are going through challenging times. They come because they are filled with grief over the loss of a beloved. You have needs. You can name them. This story reminds you anew that God cares. Picture yourself alongside the road asking Jesus for help. He will not walk by. See him asking you with love, "What do you need?" Voice that need with the trust that Jesus can help you. Sometimes the help will be healing. Sometimes it is comfort because of our grief. Sometimes it is new strength, with a reminder that Jesus will walk beside you. Seeing that love anew in the midst of that need can heal our souls, if not our bodies, if we but trust.

Just like a woman in one of my churches who came in to see me because she was overwhelmed by the loss of her husband. She felt alone, isolated, and filled with fear. She poured it out and I kept listening because she went on to say how good everyone was being to her. I said, "See, Jesus knows your needs. He cares." It was as if her eyes were opened. All of a sudden she saw that caring in a new way. Naming her need and acknowledging God heard her brought healing.

Now let us think a bit about Zacchaeus. If Jesus had asked wealthy, healthy Zacchaeus the same question, as he sat in that sycamore tree, do you think he could have answered as clearly? Probably not. All Zacchaeus knew was that there was

something missing in his life. There was an emptiness that all the money in the world could not fill. He, like the blind man, believed that in Jesus he might find an answer to his need. He could not identify it but he recognized the source of hope. It was Jesus. So he climbed a tree, faced ridicule and was rewarded. Jesus saw him, not as a sinner and tax collector, but as a person who was in need. Jesus came to his house and, in coming close to Jesus, Zacchaeus was finally able to identify his need. He had placed money above everything else. Now, he offers to give away his wealth and to repay those whom he had defrauded. He sees that this love of money was the source of his pain and loneliness and alienation from God. He was cured of his spiritual blindness, for Jesus said, "Today he had found salvation." We could also say righteousness with God.

Often we are like Zacchaeus. We have a longing, an emptiness in our lives. We know something is out of balance spiritually but if we were asked to name it, we probably could not. If this is you, Zacchaeus' experience invites you to draw nearer to Jesus, go through a period of self-examination to discern where you are needing to change and then take the steps to grow.

I think about a time I was particularly busy with things in the church and at home. Every day was jam-packed. I didn't sleep well at night because my mind continued to go at 90 miles an hour. I was functioning and getting things done but I was empty. The tank inside me was dry. Yet, if you had asked me, I would not have been able to identify what was wrong. I just knew I was out of balance. Then I started reading a small book by Parker Palmer, "Let Your Life Speak." It was about listening for God in your work and life. All of a sudden I became aware that I was not listening. Even though my life was busier than ever, I started taking some intentional time to pause, to deep breathe, to listen for God. Through that, I learned the art of saying "no" and my life began to get back into balance. It was challenging to realize that I had allowed life to separate me from the joy of life in Christ.

If you don't know where you are in need of help today, but you are feeling that emptiness, I want you to picture yourself up a sycamore tree scanning the crowd for Jesus. As you see him draw near feel the surprise and joy that he sees you, notices you and wants to spend time with you. Scramble down out of that tree and welcome him into

your home, your life. Spend some time with him. It might be through prayer, through Bible study, or just sitting in the sun being open to God. To do so will open you to self-examination and reflection and you will learn to identify those needs that you have.

See Jesus looking at you. With his eyes he is asking, "Are you willing to be vulnerable to grow?" Are we willing to change so that we can find healing and the empty spots of life can be filled?

I think too often we let the busyness of the world blind us to the kingdom values and we tend to want to hush people instead of stopping and caring. Other times, we become blind to our own needs. We need to have our inner vision restored. We do this by identifying our needs or by drawing closer to Jesus to find out what God has in store for us, if we would but see.

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