

*Dear friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision” is a quote by author and activist Helen Keller. This past week a documentary debuted on the “American Masters” series on Public Television (PBS) entitled “Becoming Helen Keller”. Even though Helen Keller died over 50 years ago, this documentary seeks to expand upon the fullness of her life and her legacy.

Beyond many of our limited understandings of a little girl who was blind, deaf and mute and unable to communicate until her life changed through the work of her teacher, Annie Sullivan, this tells “the rest of the story”. Maybe you’ve seen the stage play or read the book, “The Miracle Worker” depict this story of Helen and Annie...but this documentary helps to flesh out a life beyond a “miracle”. Understanding her life in its fullness helps give even greater depth to these words she spoke, “The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.”

Today’s Gospel reading invites us to meet a man who is physically blind and longs to have his sight restored. Yet, what we learn right from the start is despite his blindness he has vision. His vision is in truly seeing who Jesus is and the faith to trust in Jesus.

This is a great healing story in the Gospel of Mark that happens along “the way”. In other words, Jesus and his disciples are making their way to Jerusalem by way of Jericho and along they way they have time for conversation like last week’s exchange between Jesus and the disciples as to “who is the greatest” and to attract large crowds of followers and to encounter all sorts of people along the side of the road. Here is the confluence of events for “Blind Bartimaeus” and Jesus. This healing story has much detail from the location to the sequence of events including the tossing aside of a robe, springing forth when called, and the disciples offering their encouragement to “take heart”! One translation actually says, “Cheer up! On your

feet! Jesus is calling you!”...and Bartimaeus leaps up and throws off the one valuable possession he owns!

A Bulgarian painter, Julia Stankova, has depicted this story in the painting you see on the screen. She picks up on the detail of Bartimaeus’ robe being cast off and the placement of the crowd whose eyes are all wide open and looking about. Yet, in opposite corners of the painting are Jesus and Bartimaeus whose eyes are closed and are about to meet and SEE each other for the first time. There is a *visual* parallel in this picture (closed eyes, soon to be opened to sight) and a *narrative* parallel in this story as we listen. The name “Bartimaeus” is actually two words in the Hebrew “Bar” and “Timaeus”... “Bar” means “son”, so we learn that this blind man’s name is actually the “Son of Bartimaeus” and what does the “Song of Timaeus shout out to Jesus? He shouts out Jesus’ familial identity, “Son of David” have mercy on me!” Bartimaeus’ identity is with his lineage and so is Jesus’. And for Bartimaeus to know that this is the “Son of David” means that though he is blind, he does in fact SEE that Jesus is the Messiah. And, the Messiah has come to bring healing and restoration for God’s people.

Jesus recognizes that it is not Bartimaeus’ sight but rather his VISION, his faith in what he CANNOT see, that has led the son of Timaeus to shout out his name. The New Testament book of Hebrews will give words to this kind of faith saying, *“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things NOT seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)*

Yet, before Jesus’ will restore Bartimaeus’ physical vision and sight, he asks him a question, The deepest desire of Bartimaeus’ heart is for healing and so he says, *“My Teacher, let me see again.”*

People of God, imagine now that you are the one who has taken a seat along the way where Jesus is passing by. Imagine that you, a person of faith has found yourself here and now to this place where you are seated and even though you can’t physically see Jesus you KNOW

that Jesus is here... right now...with you? And Jesus asks you the same question, “What do you want me to do for you?”

What would you say? What is the deepest desire of your heart right now?

Author Kate Bowler writes in an article titled, “Gondola Prayers”, a story of when she was 5 years old and her family went on one of those gondolas up a mountain in British Columbia, Canada, and just as their cable car was suspended over the deepest part of the valley below, it stopped moving. It swayed at first, and then all went still.

Nobody spoke.

Except finally, her little five-year-old voice asked her parents, “*How do we know this is on tight?*”

She goes on to say, “That’s the question when life get’s really scary, isn’t it? When you are dangled over an abyss and there is nothing between you and... (so much unknown!) the thing no one is saying except for that little voice wondering, “How do we know this is on tight?” and...

Of course, that’s when you really start praying it is on tight... for everyone’s sake... and in the face of uncertainty, sometimes all we can do is pray.”

Blind Bartimaeus had Jesus’ full attention. You have Jesus’ full attention, too. Whether you feel like you are dangling in a place of uncertainty or not, whether you are longing for healing... trust in this good news...Jesus has stopped along the way to be with you, The Son of David knows your name. You are a child of God. Forgiven and loved, Jesus has given his life for you and in this is hope for you to see again. Amen.