

NEWPORT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST 10-28-2012

Reformation Sunday

Scripture Lessons :

Hebrews 7: 23-28

Mark 10: 46-52

Sermon *Seeing Can Be Believing*

I'll tell a little story on myself this morning. A couple of summers ago I was at a parishioner's house visiting one evening. A group of us were sitting and talking on a patio that evening. It was a warm summer night. It was about time to go home, but I needed to use the restroom before I left. So I headed toward the sliding glass door, and it was funny because I had been sorta looking at it off and on all evening wondering why in the world on a warm buggy night, the owners of house would leave the door open without a screen. Just as that thought crossed my mind again, I started to step toward that door only to hit that screen. Well needless to say I ripped a huge hole in the screen. I fell flat on my face and simply having a glass of wine, I was, flagged at that point. It was just one glass of wine. The screen was so sheer that I couldn't believe that it could possibly be there. It looked completely wide open. You and I have heard, as we discussed a few minutes ago, that many times that old saying, seeing is believing.

My sermon title, *Seeing Can Be Believing*, speaks to those times when things may or may not be believing. Like that incident with the screen door and in situations like the story of blind Bartimaeus in Mark's Gospel lesson for today. Now Mark says that when Jesus and his disciples were on their way out of Jericho they encountered this man Bartimaeus, a blind beggar sitting by the side of the road. Keep in mind, in Jesus day there was so such thing as a Safety Net for people like Bartimaeus, whose only alternative was to sit by the city gate and beg for his livelihood. When he learned that Jesus was walking by, Bartimaeus boldly called for Jesus to have mercy, to help him. And even though the crowd tried to silence him, he cries out all the louder until Jesus finally hears him. And it says he turns aside and calls him over to him. Without he hesitation Mark's Gospel says Bartimaeus springs up and he comes to Jesus where he is asked, what seems to be a to all of us a crazy question. Jesus asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" What do you want me to do for you? My boys if I ask them a question like that "Dad what do you think we want you to do for us." But Bartimaeus eagerly gives the obviously answer, "Let me see again."

And in this case, Jesus doesn't make a fuss, as we have discussed before, all the healing stories are all little bit different. Jesus doesn't use any grand words either. He doesn't even touch Bartimaeus in the process of the healing. He simply says these words, "Go, your faith has made you well." "Go for your faith has made you well". And, as Mark is fond of saying, he immediately received his sight and followed Jesus on the way. Seeing believed for blind Bartimaeus. It didn't have to be that way at all, as I tried to point out with the boys and girls. As a matter of fact, Bartimaeus in this very short episode in Jesus' ministry encountered a number of junctures where he had a choice. He had freewill to move one way or another in the process of what happened to his life that day. But instead he became believing for Bartimaeus. So what do I mean by that? Well, in much of life God reached out in love through Jesus with a number of gifts in Bartimaeus in this event in his life. Bartimaeus happened to be present in Jericho at the time when Jesus was there. Jesus hears Bartimaeus' cries in the midst of a very large crowd. Jesus turns aside from his busy ministry to meet Bartimaeus where he was. He has Bartimaeus called to his side. He asked Bartimaeus what his needs are and finally Jesus responds to Bartimaeus' need.

For one thing then, this story tells us what kind of God, the God of Jesus Christ is in the midst of our lives. Our God is a God who is active in the lives of people. Our God is a God who has compassion and hears people's cries for help. Our God is a God who is never too busy to encounter us in a personal way in the midst of the difficulties of life. Our God is one who grants us freewill and he hears what we think and cares how we feel, and finally our God is a God who responds to our very deepest needs in life.

What about Bartimaeus? First he could have continued to beg. Instead he choose to call out to Jesus for help. He chooses to call out to Jesus. Even when people tried to shut him up he persisted in seeking Jesus and when called by Jesus he didn't hesitate; he didn't dilly dally around; he didn't even walk but he sprang up and he ran to meet Jesus. When asked what he wanted, Bartimaeus cut to the chase. He got his priorities straight in life and moved right to his deepest need. And after his healing Bartimaeus did something that Jesus may or may not have expected. He stuck to Jesus like glue by followed him, it says, on the way, in Mark's Gospel. For Bartimaeus then seeing was believing. He could have jumped ship anywhere along the way along this event but choose to respond to continue all the way. And Jesus hit the nail on the head when Jesus identified the key to it all. What did he say? What made him well? Your faith has made you well. Your faith has made you well. Bartimaeus' faith led him to receive the loving gift of sight offered to him by Jesus and seeing became believing for blind Bartimaeus.

I suppose the question for us, today, is, how is our sight today? When Jesus is near, do we continue to settle for the status quo in life? Do we continue to settle

for the status quo in our faith or do we cry out for help? Do we cry out for change? Life tries to shut us up with discouragement, doubt fear or anger, unforgiveness, or cynicism. Do we cave in or do we persevere? When God calls us to be a better person that we were meant to be, do we hesitate, or do we, like Bartimaeus, spring up and run to the call? When we have the opportunity to share with Jesus, share with God at the surface our deepest need, do we settle for surface or do we go inside share with God our deepest need. Finally, when you know God has touched your life, do you follow in the way of Jesus or do you, as I tried to mention with the boys or girls, accept that gift and run in the opposite direction. Or do you try to follow in the pathway of Jesus and seek that gift and run in the opposite direction. This is like one of those movies that is, sorta, left open ended because depending on how we answer these questions seeing may or may not believe; seeing may or may not be believing.

Together we say AMEN