

Overcoming Spiritual Blindness

B-25, Mark 10:46-52

Robert Woody

Sermon-in-a-Sentence: To overcome Spiritual Blindness, we must first recognize our blindness and then continue to seek teaching and coaching that will open our heart to the Way of Jesus.

Children's Sermon:

What is blindness? What is Spiritual Blindness?

How good were you at reading before you started school? How good were you at math? How much did you know about Science? We all pretty much started out as "blind" to reading, math, science. But as we progress through school, we begin to see and understand more and more.

Our journey in our relationship with God and Jesus is similar. How much did you know about Jesus, or about our spiritual life and journey, the first time you came up for a children's sermon, or went to Sunday School? You had probably heard about God and about Jesus, but did you really know the story or stories about Jesus. We all started out pretty much spiritually blind.

How do we overcome, or how do we get healed from our "spiritual blindness"? We go to church. We learn to read the Bible. We go to Sunday School. We participate in "children's sermons." We listen to our priest, our Sunday School teachers, our parents, our sisters and brothers, our friends. And in listening to them, we begin to hear the voice of God and Jesus, and we learn to follow the Jesus Way of Love.

When do we fully recover from our "spiritual blindness"? Probably not until we get to heaven, after we leave this world. It's a lifetime Journey.

Now if you wear a collar like me, and have gone to college and seminary to be trained as a priest, then you have totally overcome "spiritual blindness". Right? Wrong! I still constantly struggle with "spiritual blindness." The more I see God and Jesus, and the more I know and learn, the more questions I have; the more I realize, I still have lots of spiritual blindness.

So, when is it OK for me and for all of us to stop stretching ourselves to learn about and know God and Jesus? We should **never stop**. We should continue going to church and going to Sunday School as long as we are alive and able, because God and Jesus will keep stretching us and teaching us more and more. And the more we are stretched, the more we overcome our spiritual blindness, the more we are able to follow the Jesus Way of Love, the more we are **blessed**.

So, I need you to tell your parents and family that they too struggle with spiritual blindness, they also need to stretch and grow, so they can continue to overcome their spiritual blindness and continue to be blessed, more and more.

Adult Sermon:

Most scholars and theologians think that our story this morning about the blind Bartimaeus, is a metaphor about **spiritual blindness** that we all share. What did Bartimaeus do when he overcame his blindness? He literally started following Jesus. Just before Jesus begins his long journey to Jerusalem, where he knows he will be crucified, in chapter 8 of Mark's Gospel, he heals another blind man, by putting saliva in his eyes. And at the end of his journey to Jerusalem, which is our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus heals Bartimaeus of his blindness, and as I mentioned before, Bartimaeus begins following Jesus. In between the healing of the two blind men, Mark tells numerous stories of Jesus talking to and about his disciples and others, and the many ways they are affected by "spiritual blindness."

For example, in Chapter 9, when the disciples argued over who among them was the greatest, Jesus sees their spiritual blindness and responds, *"Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."* (Mark 9:35) Then, trying to address his followers' spiritual blindness, Jesus took a little child, the one with the least status and power in the eyes of their culture, and wrapping her in his arms, he says to them, *"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."* (Mark 9:37)

Changing the subject and hoping to win Brownie points, one of the disciples, John, eagerly reports to Jesus that they had stopped a man from healing in "Jesus' name,"

because he was not part of their team. *"Do not stop him,"* Jesus snapped in frustration. *"Whoever is not against us is for us. . . . If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea!"* (Mark 9:39-42)

In chapter 10, a few days later, when parents were bringing a bunch of noisy, hyper kids to Jesus, so that he might touch them and bless them, the disciples, in their blindness, scolded the parents and tried to drive the kids away. *What are you doing? Why are you so blind?*

"Let the little children come to me; DO NOT STOP THEM; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, will never enter it!" And Jesus turned to the children, touched them, embraced them and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16)

Then, in chapter 10, an earnest man, who had been blessed with great riches, approached Jesus, seeking the way to eternal life. He had diligently followed the law and strived to live a holy and blameless life. Jesus' heart went out to him for his sincerity. But seeing how his spiritual focus was almost completely turned in on himself, Jesus said, *"You*

lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” He was spiritually blinded by his wealth and possessions. “Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’” (Mark 10:17-23)

On the very next day, on the road to Jericho, John and James asked, in front of the others, if they could be #1 and #2 when Jesus took over. Of course the other ten were incensed. Jesus said, *“You do not know what you are asking. . . . Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”* (Mark 10:38, 43-44)

More than any other Gospel, especially on the road to Jerusalem, Mark critiques again and again the “Spiritual Blindness” of the disciples. Why would he do that? How could they be so spiritually blind walking along side Jesus, the Messiah? I think Mark realized that all of the disciples, who are on the journey of following Jesus, have to deal constantly with our spiritual blindness. The disciples spiritual journey was about recognizing over and over, where they got it wrong, how they needed to walk in a new direction to get closer to Jesus.

Do you think that we, who don’t get to walk along literally with Jesus, might have a similar problem of **Spiritual Blindness**? Yes!!!

I’m 65. When I look back over my long life journey, my long spiritual journey, I am appalled by how spiritually blind I have been, especially in times when I thought I had it nailed down.

When I graduated from High School as a faithful Southern Baptist, and had memorized lots of Scripture, and been baptized twice, I thought I knew the Jesus Way, perfectly. I knew all Catholics and people of all other faith traditions, Muslims and Jews, were going to Hell, because they did not believe the right things. Yes, I was a Christian, a Jesus follower, but I was so Spiritually Blind.

When I got kicked out of the Baptist Church because I was divorced, and started hanging out with some Episcopal friends, I began to realize lots of places of my blindness. Falling in love with Julie, who had been Catholic and Evangelical, opened me up to other realms of my spiritual blindness.

As I discerned over 10 years, my call to seminary, I continued to find many places of spiritual blindness in my life journey. In seminary, my spiritual eyes were opened wider in so many ways, learning about theology and Scripture and pastoral care.

In the first Episcopal Church I was sent to in Tomball, outside of Houston, (which was very conservative and left the Episcopal Church in 2002, over the Gene Robinson situation, the first openly gay bishop); in that adventure, I recognized many areas of Spiritual Blindness among my friends and in myself.

And then I came to Rec. I am not the same priest or person I was 16 years ago. This reconciling and welcoming community has stretched me spiritually in so many ways. I've discovered so many places where I was still spiritually blind.

Finally, I think I get it. We are all on a **life-long** spiritual journey. We will never, at least in our time on Earth, fully see God and Jesus and fully understand the Jesus Way of Love. We have all been challenged by Jesus and by Mark's Gospel to realize, that we, like the first disciples, must continue to stretch and grow spiritually, throughout our life journey. It will never be easy; and we will never finish; but despite the challenges and confusion on our journey, we will be deeply blessed if we continue to actively **stretch** ourselves and open our spiritual eyes, so that we may more closely **follow the Way of Jesus**.

Amen