

RECOVERY OF SIGHT

Monday, December 11, 2000

“and recovery of sight to the blind” Luke 4:18

Three decades ago, during Old Testament class at Boston University School of Theology, Professor Harrell Beck told the following story.

“John, a friend of mine, who is a teacher as am I, comes to class everyday, riding the trolley. He would board the trolley beyond the Hancock Clarke House, just short of the Interstate 95 perimeter beltway, on highways 4 and 225, near his home in Lexington. Fortified with a simple breakfast and armed with his copy of the *Boston Globe* and his briefcase, he would place his token in the fare box and enjoy the hour ride to BU where he taught communications. The ride was nearly long enough for him to read the *Globe*. Without a doubt he would begin with the comics, then move to the sports, and finally to the front page.

“He would laugh about his favorite comic strips or complain about the lack of ability of the Red Socks. Hardly ever did he look up from his paper. People got off and on the trolley at nearly every stop. Yet my friend’s internal clock did call him out of his newspaper enjoyment a stop or two before the College of Liberal Arts building where he taught.

“It was two days ago that everything changed for him. During the early morning that day a terrible wind and thunderstorm blew over several trees in Lexington. With the downing of the trees the electricity was ‘knocked out’ for nearly two hours. Nearly thirty minutes after his normal rising time, he woke with a start. Realizing he was late he hurried to catch his trolley. In his hurry he forgot his paper.

“What a time he had! He had never before paid attention to all the people who boarded and exited the trolley. He was surprised to see two young girls get on, with white canes. He had never seen them before. Listening to their conversation, he learned they rode the trolley daily, getting on after him and off before he did. But he had never seen them! He had been so engrossed in his newspaper reading. And when they got off, across the street from the trolley station was the school for the blind!

“My friend’s closing comment about this story is telling. He said, here I am, a professor of communication, whose whole motivation is to open minds of students to witness what others miss - and I missed what was before my very eyes! Who was the blind one, anyway?” DH

Consider: Where have you been blind to events around you? When have you had your eyes opened?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, come to me that I might have my eyes wide open to see. Heal my blindness to the needs of others. **Amen**

Tuesday, December 12, 2000

“and recovery of sight to the blind” Luke 4:18

Sitting in my office this morning, I was listening to the CD “Heavenly” by Ladysmith Black Mambazo. The band *Precious Lord, Take My Hand*, created by Thomas A. Dorsey just finished. Thomas Dorsey died in 1993.

His hymn *Precious Lord* was written in response to the death of his wife while giving birth to their child. Within days, the child, too, had died. Devastated, laid low, broken, Thomas Dorsey was in deep remorse. His whole life - wife and child - were taken from him in a matter of hours and days. “What am I to make of all this? Why? What meaning is there in the death of my wife and child?” he must have asked.

The composing of *Precious Lord, Take My Hand* is Thomas Dorsey’s humble response to this great loss. It offers a petition to God for strength in time of need. In the face of the blinding question of “Why?” comes a revelation of faith in God in all things.

*Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light:
When my way grows drear, precious Lord, linger near,
when my life is almost gone,
hear my cry, hear my call, hold my hand, lest I fall:
When the darkness appears and the night draws near,
and the day is past and gone,
at the river I stand, guide my feet, hold my hand:
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.*

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The psalmist echoes this belief of Thomas Dorsey “...*hope is in the Lord their God, who made the heaven and earth...The Lord opens the eyes of the blind*”

(Psalm 146:5b-6a, 8a) The healing of our hearts and spirits is not in our hands. Sometimes we say that “time” heals all things. Yet in our faith, we know and declare it is God, and God alone, who has the power to overcome the grief we experience, that devastates our soul, that brings us low in spirit. God brings us through “the storm”, “hears my call”, “guides my feet, holds my hand”. Trust the creator of heaven and earth. God will lead us home.
DH

To ponder: Where is the dark night of the soul for you? Where do you feel at the river’s edge, in need of a guide, someone to hold your hand? When do you feel blinded and to whom do you turn?

Prayer: God, so many times we want to get through the day on our own. We don’t want to have to trust anyone - even you! Yet, in the deep recesses of our thinking, we remember that you are with us always. Help us to trust in your hand, outstretched in our direction. “Lead us home”. **Amen.**

Wednesday, December 13, 2000

“and recovery of sight to the blind” Luke 4:18

Nellie Palmer once shared their home with her husband. They lived just across the street from the “then” Methodist Church of North Fond du Lac. That was long before my appointment to two United Methodist Churches: Community of North Fond du Lac and Salem of Eldorado.

When I met Nellie Palmer, she was already living on the far south side of Fond du Lac and attended church regularly with the aid of a driver. For you see, she could not. Nellie was near totally blind. With tests it was discovered that she had irreconcilable damage to her retina nerve. With each passing month her eyesight became increasingly poorer.

For all of the six years I spent in this parish, never did I hear a complaint from Nellie Palmer. She lived in her own house, cooked her own meals, corresponded with many friends by letter - hand writing all of her own letters. Often she needed letters sent to her to be read aloud, but with the aid of “raised-lined” paper, using her finger to find the line, she would then carefully and precisely pen her own letters in response.

When we shared a meal, and a plate of food was set in front of her, she would be told that her meat was at “twelve o’clock”, vegetable at “three”, potato at “seven” and her salad was in a separate dish at “eleven o’clock”. Thus, by imagining the face of a clock, she could locate her food and eat. Her home furnishings remained the same, so she could always “read” what room she was in by their location.

Sometimes, as each of us have witnessed, people would speak slow and loud to her as though being blind also meant one was dense and deaf.

As a child and a teacher of public school, a Sunday School teacher, and a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, she memorized scriptures and poetry, reciting each with ease. Nellie never let her blindness get in the way of humor and laughter, telling a story, or writing poetry. She even would write new songs to familiar tunes, following after Charles Wesley.

She penned these words, reproduced in “Bits of Philosophy in Rhyme: Book II”, written between 1985-1988:

*Blindness is a lonely state.
I'm trying to accept my fate
And it would help if you would show
That you're somebody that I know.
Just say 'Hello' and give your name
And you will find I'm just the same.
I'm still alert, I live alone
And I can still use the telephone.
I'm still a person with a mind.
I didn't die, I just went blind.*

You see, Nellie Palmer was not able to see with her eyes. But she depended on God and could surely see clearly with her soul. DH

Thursday, December 14, 2000

“and recovery of sight to the blind” Luke 4:18

Let me pose a three-prong question for you to ponder. Can blindness ever be a form of healing, coming to your senses, seeing things with clarity?

Consider the passage in Acts 9:1ff. Saul of Tarsus has been witness to the stoning of Stephen outside the Lion’s Gate. He was committed to discovering and persecuting Christians. So he gained authorization to proceed to Damascus, 120 miles north of Jerusalem, just beyond Mount Hermon, to find and extradite escaped Christians.

At the peak of Mount Hermon, where the hot air of the plain met the cold air of the mountain range, violent storms were a common occurrence. In such a storm, “blindness” brought Saul to his knees. The all-powerful persecutor of Jerusalem in that moment surrendered to Christ.

Into Damascus, Saul went a changed man. He had traveled to Damascus with an avenging fury, only to be led by the hand, blind and helpless.

Ananias, through a vision, is sent to Saul, to lay his hands upon him. With fear and trembling, Ananias goes. He greets this persecutor of the Christians - now changed - with the words, *“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 9:17b). Such faith in Ananias. Such humility in Saul. And with the words spoken, sight returned to Saul. At once he committed himself in faith through baptism, ate food and regained his strength.

Saul thought he could see clearly, but was blind to God at work in a small group of Christian women and men. And when the light of God blinded him, he could see the joy and wonder of God at work in the lives of simple people throughout the land. DH

To ponder: Where do you need to be blinded by the power of joy and mercy to finally “see” God at work in people who otherwise are not of value? How do you respond when one with whom you are fighting greets you as “my sister” or “my brother”?

Prayer: God, use even my blindness to open my eyes. Help me to be humble and accept mercy in the midst of my “holy righteousness”. This I pray in Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

Friday, December 15, 2000

“and recovery of sight to the blind” Luke 4:18

Blindness to what is around us keeps us from seeing. Blindness that hoodwinks our judgment causes us to become numb to the needs of others. It occurred when we “at home” saw and heard the “body counts in country” during the war in Vietnam. We were blinded to the pain and fear of soldiers patrolling the jungles of South East Asia. We were blind to how our insensitivity affected soldiers returning “state side” by both our push for more weapons and our push to get out of Vietnam. Soldiers returned maimed, beaten, and broken.

This blindness, unfortunately, is not limited to our culture, our time, or ourselves. John Newton was blind to his own slave trading. A captain of a slave ship, he had brought slaves to the early colonies and to England. On one trip, having left the Gold Coast of Africa, he “came to his senses” - perhaps his blindness was removed - and turned his ship around, landed, and set the slaves free.

John Newton, transformed in faith under the influence of George Whitefield and John & Charles Wesley, was ordained and became an influential leader in the Church of England. Author of *Amazing Grace*, John wrote of his own life - being “lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.”

His tombstone epitaph reads, *“John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slavers of Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.”* Having struggled through many difficult times, God’s grace would still lead him home.

It is significant to us, even today, to understand that our blindness does not have to be permanent. Though there were atrocious deeds that John Newton had committed in “his blindness”, the power of God’s forgiveness and mercy is greater still. He experienced the release of his own fetters in the release of his spirit. God has the power to remove the blinders not only from our eyes, but from our hearts and souls as well.

God can take a simple, wayward, slave-trader, and turn him completely around. What more can God do with you and me?

The last verse penned by John Newton holds the key of God’s unlimited grace and love:

*Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
and mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
a life of joy and peace.*

A man set free, able to see what God really intended, became God’s servant. Be very clear - God can even turn us around, bring us to see the rainbow of the covenant, and the great variety of human beings. May God do for us as much if not more! DH

Saturday, December 16, 2000

“and recovery of sight to the blind” Luke 4:18

Remember Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, who called out to Jesus? *“As Jesus was passing through Jericho,”* Bartimaeus was sitting at the city gates. Jericho is 15 miles from Jerusalem. It was nearly Passover. Everyone who lived within 15 miles of the Holy City was to celebrate Passover within the walls of Jerusalem. Yet many were unable to make the journey.

Crowds of “well-wishers” would bid the pilgrims Godspeed on their way. Jesus was an attraction that no one wanted to miss. Some gathered to scoff, while others were curious. All wanted to catch a glimpse of this bold young Galilean who stood against the strong might of orthodoxy.

Not about to miss anybody moving through Jericho’s gates, blind Bartimaeus had the “eyes” of other disabled and misfit friends to describe these faithful pilgrims. When told Jesus was passing out of Jericho, Bartimaeus threw off all that held him in place and called like a fool to get Jesus’ attention. Most saw him as insignificant, a dirty blind beggar - not a man. Certainly not a man with whom any rabbi would stop and listen. He was wasting his time.

Yet the sensitive, patient, and humble Jesus stopped and took no further step. Rather he called Bartimaeus to himself. It sounds crazy that Jesus would ask Bartimaeus what he wanted. It seems obvious to us. Yet, Jesus did not presume to know what this beggar would say. Nor did Jesus act before Bartimaeus told him, *My prayer is that I might see again.*” And with a word, healing came - sight returned.

Are we as ready to have Jesus bring healing to us, as Bartimaeus was to see again? Do we have an equally deep faith as this “former blind beggar” had? Bartimaeus was a beggar along the way. And he became a follower “of the way”. May we be as committed as we journey home. DH

Sunday, December 17, 2000

“and recovery of sight to the blind” Luke 4:18

It was August 1984. Clark & Esther Bardole, Nancy’s parents, my in-laws, Nancy and I, and our two children, Sarah and Matthew spent nearly the whole month in Switzerland. Trips into Italy, France, and Germany helped make this trip worthwhile.

Being able to travel to Europe was a dream come true. We were to visit and stay with John and Lois Graf in Uetendorf, in the canton of Bern. Their home was available and adequate though they were in the USA for a family wedding. The privilege of visiting in Europe was exciting. We wondered how we would get by without knowing any German.

I sort of thought of myself as quite “cultured” and well educated since I’d been the first in my extended family to attend - let alone finish college. I was also a graduate of seminary.

When we landed in Luxembourg, Luxembourg we stayed close to our hotel, taking small trips by trolley and bus. To save money we bought food in a local grocery. I remember that we had our items in our arms waiting in line at the cash register. Well aware of the educational structure in Europe, a person who was working in a grocery, almost without a doubt, was unable to go on to the “gymnasium” but went to a “trade school”.

While standing there in line I had my “eyes opened”. The clerk spoke to one party ahead of us in clear German. The party immediately ahead of us she greeted in perfect French. And when she checked out our items, she spoke to us in wonderful English. My pride had been in the way - keeping me from seeing what was true. I was thinking because of my rich and varied education, I was more important than this clerk behind the counter at a small grocery in Luxembourg. Certainly more educated.

But when I compared my one language that I could speak fluently versus at least three, if not four or five languages this young woman could speak, I realized that I was blind to my own inflated importance.

God can use our blindness to help us come to our senses, to see with our heart along with our eyes. Where does your own sense of self-importance get in your way? In what ways do you need to have the balloon of pride pricked? How do you need to have the blindness that has limited you to be lifted from your eyes, your vision, in order to see the beauty and grace and wonder and joy in the life of each person?

May God be at work in you and me to break through the cataracts that limit our vision, the blindness to hope and sanity, and the insensitivity of pride. May new sight be yours this Advent! DH