



The healing of Blind Bartimaeus is a well-loved passage in Scripture. It confirms to us that Jesus is a healer. It confirms to us that physical challenges will not separate us from the love of God. It confirms to us that Jesus sees even a beggar and so Jesus will see and hear us, too. Frankly, it makes us feel good.

While I like feeling good, simply feeling good isn't going to go very far in the long run when I consider what Jesus is asking of us as his followers. Jesus wants us, I think, to look behind and beyond the plain text. In other words, Jesus wants us to engage in Midrash – look at what this text can tell us today about our faith, about our world, about how God implores us to see those who are blind and to do something about it. God isn't

giving any of us, at least as far as I know the power to heal physical challenges (if you do have the power to heal, please let us know!). God is, however, asking us to walk alongside of each other, especially when challenges arise.

I also think that Jesus is asking us to consider where and how we are blind in the figurative or metaphorical sense. Maybe we don't pass by a beggar on the side of the road, but certainly we pass by others everyday who have less than we do, who are challenged in becoming fully human and fully responsible members of society. We pass by others who maybe need a smile or word of cheer. We pass by others who need to hear the Good News of God in Jesus Christ.

In our day, among the groups that we are often blind to are those who are on the Autism Spectrum. The unemployment rate of autistic adults with college degrees is 85%. Disabled persons, in general, have a 10.5% unemployment rate.<sup>1</sup> Why is that? It may partly be because of the need for adjustments in our work space or work equipment. It may be because those who are on the Spectrum can be challenging to us in their coping mechanisms. It may be for other reasons, including our general tendency to shy away from those who are different from us.

I got interested in this topic through a series of novels by Estelle Ryan. Her protagonist is Dr. Genevieve Lenard, a high functioning person with autism.<sup>2</sup> Genevieve is hired by an insurance agency in Strasbourg, France to help investigate art crimes. Her autism requires some adjustments to work space and relationships, but she is an expert at reading nonverbal expressions. Her abilities, as part of a team, lead to successful resolution of art thefts.

And then I came across an article by James Mahoney, Executive Director, and head of “Autism at Work” for JP Morgan Chase.<sup>3</sup> The article explains the work the Bank has done to hire people with autism – to help those people find meaningful work and life. In fact, the Bank has

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thinkingautismguide.com/2018/02/why-is-autistic-unemployment-rate-so.html> (October 26, 2018)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.estelleryan.com/index.html> (October 26, 2018)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.jpmorganchase.com/corporate/news/insights/jmahoney-autism-at-work-program.htm>

documented that those with autism exceed the performance of you and me, normal folks, in certain functions. How can we continue to be so blind to the possibilities of someone who has autism? Or who is paralyzed from a surfing accident resulting in a broken neck? Or who is deaf? Or who is – fill in the blank with any number of disabilities.

Jesus calls us to see – truly see – each and every human being as someone worthy of dignity and respect. To celebrate our differences. To remember that we are more together than we are apart. That our community is deeper, richer, when we include everyone regardless of limitations. Each of us is disabled in some way. It may not be outwardly evident. It may be in a way that only we know – we’ve gotten so good at putting on a happy face. Each of us, though, has limitations but that doesn’t mean we aren’t loved by God. It doesn’t mean that we can’t contribute our gifts and talents – large or small – to helping make God’s realm a reality in this place and in this time.

Jim Sinocchi, the young man who broke his neck body surfing on New Year’s Eve while vacationing some 35+ years ago, now heads the Office of Disability Inclusion for Chase. He writes:

Disability inclusion is no longer about automatic doors, curb cuts, ramps and legislation. These historic efforts were essential at the time and represented the thinking and necessary change required for people with disabilities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, the new era of disability inclusion is about “assimilation” - - hiring professionals with disabilities into the robust culture of the firm. Full assimilation requires a leadership team with the will, commitment and attitude to identify, train and groom professionals with disabilities for leadership positions...<sup>4</sup>

Today our hearts and minds and souls are bruised by the events of this last week – of explosive devices sent and of killings in a synagogue during the naming service for a new child. How might we reach out to those who are disaffected and have come to believe that violence and hatred are appropriate ways to interact with those with whom they disagree? Are those who perpetrated these and other violent acts this week ones that we have been blind to? How have we failed to see their needs and to address their frustrations before violence becomes the answer? It certainly isn’t “don’t ask, don’t tell” or just look the other way when you see or hear something that is hateful.

We are our brothers’ keepers, even more so in this time where the divisions among us appear to be growing deeper each day. It is on us, as disciples of Jesus, to see and to act when someone has lost hope and faith in our way of life and has come to believe that certain people no longer have value as human beings simply because they are different. It is up to us to continue to reach out when someone’s world view is full of hate towards others. It is up to us to live a life that evidences the love that Jesus has for us that says hate is wrong. Violence will not solve the ills of the world or in our own lives.

Our Collects give us some ways to address the place we find ourselves in after this last week:

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.jporganchase.com/corporate/news/insights/jsinocchi-a-new-dawn-for-disability-inclusion.htm>  
(October 26, 2018)

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord... (BCP #14, p. 818).

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, and especially the hearts of the people of this land, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen** (BCP #27, p. 823).