

***Loving God...Changing Lives: Bartimaeus***  
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher  
March 22, 2020 John 9 selected verses 1-41

When I was in college, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and her book *Death and Dying* was all the rage, at least for Psychology majors. Her five stages of grief were ground breaking. In fact, my senior project was on her work. When confronted with a death of a loved one or a shocking loss she outlined a process that we all travel through the grief. They are summed up as Denial, Anger, Bargaining; and before you get to the final stage of Acceptance, there is the darkness of Depression.

This way of looking at grief worked nicely for me until... until I experienced irretrievable loss. It was only then that dealing with loss is not so tidy as Kubler-Ross makes it seem. We are in a time of great loss, and what is more, we are all experiencing it -- no one is exempt. From what I can tell, it certainly is not fitting into neat little stages. All the feelings are there but they do not necessarily go in a nice simple order and we all are dealing with it differently.

I don't know about you but I have experienced:

***Denial:*** "I think this is all a bit over blown -- aren't we over reacting just a bit?"

***Anger:*** "Where are the test kits? Where is the protection for our health care workers? Why are people hoarding toilet paper and bottled water for heaven's sake?"

***Bargaining:*** "OK I will keep my distance and we will play by the rules but please let us get a Pastoral Nominating committee going? We need to stay on schedule!"

***Depression:*** "When will we have this over? What are the months ahead looking like? Where is the chocolate; I need more chocolate?"

***Acceptance:*** "It is what it is. I have time to hear the birds sing. The beauty of nature is not canceled. This may be the most creative time in our history.

Newton Discovered Calculus and Shakespeare wrote King Lear during the times of isolation from the Plague We will come out of this stronger and better.”

I have had all these thoughts and more in the last 10 minutes! In this community loss, in which we are all experiencing grief, there is no one removed, yet we are in different feelings at any given moment.

Today I am tasked with reminding each of us of the “Good Word” -- the Good Word in an alien landscape as I talk to the light blinking, which is the camera, at the end of the room. I am believing and very grateful for all those who are reading this, because we all need to affirm the Good Word and we all are called to share it. I do so with a boldness because God’s Good Word has survived plagues and pogroms, blights and massacres. It remains strong even when people try to sanitize and destroy it. All else is temporary and fleeting -- God’s Good word remains.

Today’s scripture is about Jesus healing a blind man. Bartimaeus was born blind. There is no crisis, no orders to stay home. It is a typical Sabbath Day where everything is rather ordinary, including blind Bartimaeus at the gate begging. In his own world of darkness, he is calling out hoping people will take pity on him.

Jesus’ act of giving sight to Bartimaeus puts the established order in a tailspin.

I will read portions of *The Message*, a contemporary rendering by Eugene Petersen: Listen for the Good Word!

Walking down the street. Jesus saw a man blind from birth. Jesus’ disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be blind? Jesus said, “You are asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When the night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world’s Light. We must work the works of the One who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”...

The man went and washed –And saw.

Soon the town was buzzing. The man’s relatives and those who saw him year after year as a blind man begging were saying, “Why isn’t this the man we knew, who sat here and begged?”

Others said, “That’s him all right!”

They asked, “How did you get your eyes open?”

“A man named Jesus made paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam (meaning Sent) and wash.’ I did what he said. When I washed. I saw.”

“So, where is he?”

“I don’t know” ...

<sup>5</sup>The Pharisees grilled him again as how he came to see. He said, “He put a clay paste on my eyes and I washed, and now I see.” <sup>16</sup>Some of the Pharisees said, “Obviously, this man can’t be from God. He doesn’t keep the Sabbath.” Others countered, “How can a bad man do miraculous, God-revealing things like this?” there was a split in their ranks....

<sup>26</sup>They said, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” <sup>27</sup>“I’ve told you over and over and you haven’t listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you so eager to become his disciples?”

With that, they jumped all over him. “*You* might be a disciple of that man, but we’re disciples of Moses. <sup>29</sup>We know for sure that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man even comes from.” <sup>30</sup>The man replied, “This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes! It’s well known that God isn’t at the beck and call of sinners, but listens carefully to anyone who lives in reverence and does God’s will. That someone opened the eyes of a man born blind has never been heard of -- ever. If this man didn’t come from God; he wouldn’t be able to do anything.” They said, “You are

nothing but dirt! How dare you take that tone with us!” Then they threw him out on the street.

<sup>35</sup>Jesus heard that they had thrown the man out, and went and found him. Jesus asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” <sup>36</sup>He answered, “Point him out to me, sir, so that I can believe in him.” Jesus said, “You are looking right at him. Don’t you recognize my voice?”

“Master, I believe.” The man said and he worshiped him.

This is the Word of the Lord: Thanks be to God.

That ordinary Sabbath Day changed Bartimaeus’ life forever. It also changed the Pharisee’s lives forever. In anger and blindness, it sets them on the road to destroy the giver of the Light. For Bartimaeus, he was once blind but now he could see. And what he saw was that Jesus was someone to follow. The Pharisees become even more narrow and myopic as their way of life is threatened and they blame Jesus. Tucked into this story is a lifeline that we can use at this moment when we are careening through the stages of grief and loss in a topsy turvey way. When nothing makes sense to anyone and we don’t know what to expect, hold onto the lifeline that Jesus tells his disciples. “I am the light of the World.” That light won’t diminish. Blind Bartimaeus figured it out. Unfortunately others were too short sighted.

Together as humanity faces the coming weeks, heck as we face the next hour, be patient with each other and be patient with yourself. We are in a maelstrom of loss and grief and we can’t neaten it up with theories from a textbook. Be kind to each other and know we are all scared and unsure. Hang onto the lifeline that will keep us firm and steady. That will give us strength when we cannot see the road ahead. God is with us and God’s love will not falter. We are connected in ways that support and strengthen us and will continue to surprise us. This day and everyday let us stand with the One who brings the light to the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.