

NO SUCH THING AS BLIND FAITH

[written in oral form]

For some strange reason, Kansas has been on my mind this week.

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I knew this very fine lady from Kansas. She was engaging, in a gentle, humble way, yet with a bit of zest, and she was beautiful.

Her name was Linda, and she was a member of my church in Kansas.

She was single and lived alone, so I thought I should visit her regularly,..... it was the least I could do. Besides, I enjoyed my visits with her. I really liked Linda.

One time, I joked with her that I wanted to be able to put her against the wall and really straighten her out.

People are glancing at Leslie..... What are you imagining?

What are you seeing in this account? What is your vision of Linda??

Linda was 90 years old, and she was severely hunched over, at nearly a 45 degree angle.

I did joke with her that I wanted straighten her out.

She appreciated my humorous compassion.

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I intentionally set you up to point out that sometimes we don't see clearly.

The seeing I'm referring to is perception, intellectual vision and understanding.

Quite often what we see / perceive is very different than what someone else sees.

For example, some may see in the 1939 movie, the Wizard of Oz, another Kansas girl sorting out what home and family means.

Yet, Here is another overview of "The Wizard of Oz":

Transported to a surreal landscape, a young girl kills the first person she meets, and then teams us with three strangers to kill again."

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On Halloween night, some will see kids creatively dressed up, having great fun, going door to door to get treats.

While others will see children being influenced by a sinister, ungodly spirit....or... being taught to lust after junk food.

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One person may look at the mountains and see an enchanting recreation area/ a playground.

Another will see a pristine wilderness that shouldn't be disrupted.

A person from Kansas, may see justice in the game of baseball, while others see disappointment and a missed opportunity.

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Who is perceiving correctly?            Who is right?

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"Seeing" one's own view as truth is very important to most individuals; most don't want subjectivity, blurry perceptions or biases.

With multiple cameras, we come close to that in sports. No longer are we limited to what the referee sees. Even so, the cameras don't see everything,..... and besides.... there are no instant replays in life.

We want to believe that we are seeing clearly, to the point where we are more than confident in our own view of things..... of life.

It sure seems that one's "position" / theology / bias has superseded compassion and grace. People / community / relationships are being marginalized in our world of social media and sound bites.

I think the need for certainty has risen to new heights.

This is especially true in politics. Anymore, the stance is "my way" ... or everything will be disastrous.

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An undertone in last Monday's election, by a majority of Canadians, was "We want hope over certainty" and "We want an open and generous Canada, even if that comes with inherit risks."

I found that tacit message encouraging.

Perhaps, the cataracts of distrust will peel away so that we will see our neighbours with gracious eyes,... with eyes that also capture our own fears and insecurities in the image of the whole.

And, may we see Syrian refugees as our neighbours.....and ISIS and the Syrian government in the same light, too.

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Today's Gospel lesson from Mark is about seeing.

The Bible, especially the Gospels frequently referred to seeing as an enlightened way of understanding. Light was used as a metaphor for Jesus and the way of Jesus.

Mark 10:46-52 states that Jesus, along with his disciples and a large crowd of groupies were leaving Jericho. He was heading for Jerusalem.

I wonder what that looked like.

Were the disciples hovering around Jesus, like body guards?

Was the crowd merely content to be in proximity? Were they hoping for a side show--a little miracle magic? Why were they there?

I wonder if the crowd truly saw Jesus or were they blind to God's way, because they sure deserted Jesus once he engaged in Jerusalem?

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Do Remember that the Gospel accounts are well crafted books. The placement of this event, right before the Jerusalem narratives, is not an accident. This ..."healing" is here for a reason,..... and hopefully .....we'll see why.

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The first prod to wake up / to open the readers' eyes is in the name of the blind beggar -- Bartimaeus son of Timaeus.

Bar means son of. So, Bar...timaeus means son of Timaeus.

It would be the same as saying Johnson, the son of John. The first century reader, would pause and think, "What? What's going on?"

This creative twist causes the mind's eye to open a little wider.

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Just like today, it was common to ignore beggars sitting by the side of the road,.....yet this beggar had a name -- another mental wakeup ploy.

Moreover, this beggar refused to be ignored....because...not only had he heard of Jesus, just as the crowd had, BUT.... he saw more than they did. But Wait. He's blind....., yet he's seeing.....at a deeper level than optical vision.

He was seeing, not with eyes, but his inner vision which allowed him to see / to understand.

He used Messianic terminology to call Jesus. He believed he was in the presence of divine activity.

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This is a healing story. It is a story about acquiring sight, **again**.

The beggar didn't fully regain his sight until after Jesus' declaration, but he was showing signs of clearing vision by how he petitioned Jesus. He called out, "Have mercy on me."

I don't believe he was begging for pity....because as the Job passage presents, confession and asking for forgiveness / mercy is THE response to understanding / TO SEEING God.

Listen again to verses 5 and 6 from Job 42:

"...but now my eyes see you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

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Once we start to see,..... we not only get a glimpse of God,..... but we see the things that are blocking our view--the barriers that we've been holding onto. And, we may not like what we are seeing, and subsequently, ...begging for mercy makes perfect sense.

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Begging for mercy, stopped Jesus in his tracks. Yet, the disciples tried to keep the beggar quiet. --That's very telling about their view on things.

But, the beggar refused to be silenced, and called out more loudly.

He could NOT contain his need to encounter Jesus, and Jesus invited the blind beggar to him. Jesus responded with an invitation.

*I love this part; it is so profound and penetrating.*

In the disciples words, "Take heart; get up, HE is calling you."

"He/ Jesus is calling you"

Jesus is calling you.

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Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, sprang up and went to Jesus.

That's pretty intense, especially the part about tossing the cloak.

Generally, beggars don't own very much, and the outer garment is like a coat--it's protection / security. It's precious.

Yet, He tossed it aside. He tossed it All aside and went to Jesus!

I wonder what he was thinking?... what he was doing?

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The Mark story also has another twist in it...which is the blind man, after Jesus asked him what he wanted, replied, "...let me see again." **Again.**

The reader can only speculate when he lost his sight.  
We can only speculate when the blindness arrived.... and how.  
Did it come on slowly..... or from a terrible event. ???

Perhaps,.....he could see as a child, .... and what would that mean:  
**seeing as a child?** We can only wonder.....???

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To his request, Jesus said, "GO" .... move / be active / do.... There is no hint that Jesus meant go Away, not at all.  
Jesus said, "Go / engage..... **Your Faith has made you well.**"

Your faith has made you well..... Faith enhances seeing; faith brings healing, and connected to "that" faith...is Action.  
Plus, it is **Not seeing is believing**, but rather the opposite.  
\*Believing / trusting in God is seeing. The blind mind had put the pieces together; he realized who Jesus was..... he eyes were opening up.

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The episode ends with the insight, "**Immediately**, he regained his sight,.... and he followed Jesus..... ON the way.  
No hesitation --immediately!  
**On the way**.....that seems vague..... or is it?

Maybe "the way" is life / the journey.... once we regain our vision.  
Once Bartimaeus could fully see, then of course he'd want to follow Jesus...**on the way**..... because he would be a fool not to.  
Only a blind man would chose to go a different way.... to chose to lose sight of God's mercy and love.

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The healing of Bartimaeus is NOT merely a blurb about restoring the function of a beggar's physical eyes.  
This is a lesson on how to see..... how to be well/whole.....and.... how to live in the full spectrum of life.  
Moreover, what does one see when following "the way" of Christ?

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Just read the following verses in Mark to get an idea what Bartimaeus saw...."on the way."

I'll mention a few things, but read those verses when you get home, and read them imaging Bartimaeus' open eyes... taking it all in.

'On the way", Jesus confronted injustices. Jesus exposed disrespect and abusive leaders and tyrants. Jesus questioned authority, criticized the leaders and even made political comments.

To be sure, Jesus taught about love, and he also compared the generosity of a widow to those who are affluent.

In addition,.....there was suffering and persecution,... and more.

I'm troubled when I hear the term / the concept "Blind faith."

It doesn't make any sense when people cling to ignorance, such as insisting that the world was made in 6 days, 10,000 years ago.

It is truly problematic and a contradiction when those who claim to be followers of Christ, hide in a sheltered culture, refuse to see a world full of questions and conflict,.... and do not actively confront injustices.

Following Christ is not static. It's GO..... go with awareness / Go in faith that opens the eyes to see more.....to see lots of things, including stuff we don't like.

Moreover, the truth is not static either..... because we **are** "on the way. Things change as we progress.

What or How I saw things 10 or 5 years ago is different than what and how I see today. I've progressed / changed along the way.

The scenery changes / reality changes / the world changes.... and God is on "the way" with us.....Leading us through those changes.

God's Justice, compassion, Love and grace are applied... in new ways, transforming ways.... with new and different applications.

I do believe seeing is learning and growing..... on the way.  
The view changes on a journey, and so does the one seeing.

Blind faith doesn't make sense. Ignorance is Not bliss.

Do we really believe God wants us to stumble our way through life, in a world no bigger than our reach?  
Does God want us to be tethered as a blind person holding onto another's arm?

I should note, that people who are physically blind can live joyous and productive lives, albeit limited in some ways. And, I know they'd like to see.

However, this is a story about seeing divine light / spiritual light / the meaning of life.

And, I don't think a loving God has such a diminutive, restricting view of us that God wants us to grope about in the dark.

Do you see what I'm saying?.....

No, that question is framed incorrectly.

Do you see what Mark is saying and what Jesus is saying?

God is calling us out into the light to see.

What should we do with our feet and what holds us back?

Moreover, I believe God's call to us...includes our brains.

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Mark prompts us to consider where we stand. Are we with the blind crowd? .....with the myopic disciples... or with the one crying out for mercy,... for Jesus so as to see again?

And, the prompt includes "immediately" joining the transforming way.