

Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

“Jesus and his disciples came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.”

—The Gospel of Mark

A Deeper Vision

By Ken Woodley

One can read a piece of scripture many times and feel complete familiarity with the words and their message. Then read it one more time and find a new kernel of revelatory truth. That happened to me with this passage from Mark.

What hit me right between the eyes—this time—was that, rather than go to the blind man, Jesus instructed that the beggar Bartimaeus be told to come to him, instead.

I thought that was just a bit insensitive. It would have been much easier for Jesus to go to the blind man. But Bartimaeus had no difficulty at all. “So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus,” the Gospel of Mark tells us. No problem. And that is a crucial point.

Despite the potentially confusing presence of the disciples and the “large crowd” leaving Jericho, a man who cannot see was able find and stand face to face with Jesus, not having to hunt and search by trial and error, person to person. Surrounded by the darkness of being blind, the man was able to zero in on the light of Christ.

It was as if he had a homing signal. As if his soul had radar and sonar capabilities that led him unerringly to Jesus.

Jesus, of course, heals the man, telling him that his faith has made him well. But the events leading up to that healing are relevant to everyone. As is the healing, itself.

We all suffer from some form of at least momentary “blindness.” There are events and circumstances (both past and present), fears and anxieties, any and all of life’s challenges that can make us feel that we are surrounded by darkness, suddenly blind to the light of Christ and his message of God’s love and grace.

When that happens—and at some point in our lives it happens to us all, at least once—it is best to follow the example of Bartimaeus and shout with our soul for Jesus to come and heal our blindness.

And continue shouting with stubborn persistence, no matter how much the darkness that has blinded us tries to keep us silent, as those around Bartimaeus had attempted to silence him. Because: when our yearning soul persists in crying out for Jesus, we will be found by Christ.

Our eyes will be opened to his light.

And in that light we will understand that Jesus never went anywhere. He never left us behind, outside the walls of our own Jerichos. In our blindness, we couldn’t see that he was right there beside us all the time.

In our moments of blindness, it is our faith that truly is a homing signal for our soul, radar and sonar that will unerringly lead us to the truth of the ceaseless presence of Holy love in our lives.

But there is something else we need to remember:

We mustn’t forget to throw off our cloaks, just as Bartimaeus did. That cloak had become a cocoon of imprisonment. That cloak was the “skin” of Bartimaeus’ former, blind existence.

Throwing it off, as he sprang up and came to Jesus, he became like a butterfly pulling free of its chrysalis.

Spreading the wings of his new life of sight.

So, too, can we realize that vision.

Because the deepest “sight” we possess has nothing at all to do with our eyes.

