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Eyes to See
Mark 10: 46-52
November 11, 2012

We're going to begin today by watching a short scene from the film *Amelie*. *Amelie* is a French Romantic comedy released in 2001. *Amelie* is a quirky young woman in Paris who decides to help those around her and along the way discovers love, of course. If you want to move so you can see the screen, that's fine with me. There are subtitles, and they go by quickly, so be watching for those. If you can't see the screen well, or don't catch the subtitles, don't worry, I'll walk through the scene afterwards.

(Show the clip)

This scene surprises me. The narrator tells us that *Amelie* has a warm feeling and she's ready to help others and then we see her standing next to a blind man who is waiting to cross a street and we think, "Oh, she's going to help the blind man cross the street. Isn't that nice." And she does, "Let me help you. Step down. Here we go!" But then she keeps talking, "The Drum major's widow! She's worn his coat since the day he died." And you see this woman walk by in a marching band uniform. "The horse's head has lost an ear," and you see this horse head above the shops with only one ear. It was at this point as I'm watching the film that I said out loud, "Oh, she's becoming this man's eyes!" And she keeps going, "That's the florist laughing, he has crinkly eyes." Here we see the blind man and a gentle smile is spreading across his face, like he's sat down to a cup of coffee and a piece of pie. She's giving him a wonderful gift. *Amelie*

continues and we start to notice how descriptive she is, how she offers helpful information, answers possible questions, and points out things that are strange and funny. “In the bakery window, lollipops. Smell that! They’re giving out melon slices. Sugarplum ice cream! We’re passing the park butcher. Ham 79 francs. Spareribs 45! Now the cheese shop. Picadors are 12.90, Cabecaus are 23.50. A baby’s watching a dog that’s watching the chickens on the rotisserie. Now we’re at the kiosk by the metro, I’ll leave you. Bye!”

The blind man stops, looks to the sky and now his smile is from ear to ear, lots of teeth. By walking with him, Amelie gave this man a simple thing he needed, help getting across the street, but then she gave him something more. Her gift added a dimension to his life. It was deeper, richer, delightfully strange and surprisingly beautiful. Amelie helped him see.

In our passage for today Bartimaeus, a blind man is at the side of the busy street and he is screaming, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” People tell Bartimaeus to be quiet, “You’re bothering people, you’re bothering me, you’re not worth Jesus’ time anyway,” they say. And Bartimaeus keeps on yelling. Even louder now. Marcus Borg speaks of sin as having many dimensions and two of them are hubris, and sloth. Hubris is believing that you are or should be the center of the world’s attention, and he defines sloth as letting the world and others decide for you what your life be. Bartimaeus is not guilty of the sin of sloth. He is not going to let some cranky people come between him and Jesus. He keeps yelling, Jesus hears him and says, “Call him here.” Jesus shows us once again that the least of these matter. The most vulnerable among us are not to be cast aside.

Bartimaeus goes to Jesus as fast as he possibly can. Jesus asks, “What can I do for you?” And Baritmaeus says, “Let me see again.” Jesus says, “Go, your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

With healing and other miracle stories the question “So what really happened?” is always lingering in the background. We could spend time talking about what we think actually happened, but it doesn’t really matter. We can believe this story happened or didn’t happen and still be good Christians. And I’m not talking B-Christians, you know, if only I could affirm the Nicene Creed I could pull my grade up a little bit. I’m talking A-grade, excellent Christians, because miracle stories are not about what Jesus did, they are about what the living Christ does.

What does the living Christ do? The living Christ helps us see. What does faith in Christ do? Faith in Christ makes us well. As much as this story from Mark affirms the worth of people who are physically blind, in ancient times and in our own, the story is also for people who aren’t physically blind, but still need help seeing. As we are walking along the Way, the living Christ will be talking in our ear, helping us see things that we wouldn’t see otherwise. The living Christ will help us see worth and value in people we’ve given up on. Maybe this is a place where we need to regain our sight. Christ will help us see the humanness in those who are most vulnerable. Christ will help us see vulnerability in places we hadn’t noticed it before. The living Christ will help us see worth in people we don’t like, in people who offend us, in people of a different political persuasion, in people who have hurt us so deeply that our lives came to a screeching halt. The living Christ helps us see worth where we wouldn’t otherwise. This heals us, together.

The living Christ will help us see possibilities for healing: in our bodies, in our minds, in our relationships, in our nation. The living Christ will show us powerful love. The living Christ will show us powerful love that holds us, and helps us and can do more than we will ever know. As long as I see that powerful love, and feel that love, I trust that God is alive and well. I trust that there is indeed a powerful, sacred dimension to life that weaves its way into the fabric of my own existence. As Christ helps me see sacred, powerful love, I let go of more of my fear. As

Christ helps me see sacred powerful love, I change my ways. As Christ helps me see sacred powerful love, I live with joy and delight. Faith in Christ is healing.

We're big fans of the Laura Ingalls Wilder books at our house. If we go on a trip we like to have them on CD or sometimes Sara will read out of the book as we're going down the road. I'm someone who cries easily. One scene in the *Sound of Music* gets me every time. One trip Sara was reading out of *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, and I remember I was driving down the road and my hands were wiping my eyes like windshield wipers in a heavy rain. Pa's decided to move the family out west. He goes ahead and has Ma, Mary, Laura, and Carrie come later on the train. This is the family's first train ride, and I want to share some of the chapter where Ma and the girls are on the train. Mary is blind due to scarlet fever and Laura starts describing the train to her.

The door opened and a tall man came in. He wore a blue coat with brass buttons, and a cap, with CONDUCTOR in letters across its front.

The conductor went on and Laura said low (to Mary), "So many shining brass buttons on his coat and it says CONDUCTOR right across the front of his cap."

"And he is tall," Mary said, "His voice is high up."

Laura tried to tell her how fast the telegraph poles were going by. She said, "The wire sags down between them and swoops up again," and she counted them. "One-ooop! Two-ooop! Three! That's how fast we're going."

On that dreadful morning when Mary could not see even sunshine full in her eyes, Pa had said that Laura must see for her. He had said, "Your two eyes are quick enough and your tongue, if you will use them for Mary. And Laura had promised. So she tried to be eyes for Mary and it was seldom that Mary need ask her, "See out loud for me Laura, please."

Just then someone went by, and Laura looked up. She went on. "A thin man with bristly eyebrows and long moustaches and an adam's apple just went by. He can't walk straight, the train is going so fast. Oh Mary! He's turning a little handle...and water's coming out. The water's pouring right into a tin cup. Now he's drinking it. His Adam's apple is bobbing up and down. He's filling the cup again..."

Last week I talked about how the great commandment to Love God and love the neighbor calls us to work for justice, that the heart of Christianity, the cross, is a symbol of Jesus confronting powers of sin and injustice, and dying because of it. But also at the heart of Christianity is love that is as tender as Laura promising to help her sister Mary so she can share

in the joy and excitement of life. At the heart of Christianity is an affirmation about God, about that sacred power of love that is larger than the universe and as close as the air we breathe. God wants us to live with delight. God wants us to live free from fear. God wants us to have time for leisure and recreation and one another. God wants us to know that love is here, it is strong, nothing is more powerful, and so we can always have hope. And the living Christ is among us, whispering in our ear, helping us see what we dare not miss. Faith in Christ heals us. Amen.

Thanks be to God! Amen.