

This week's reading is the end of the second section of Mark. The section begins (8:22) and ends (10:52) with the healing of a blind man and in the middle Jesus announces his upcoming death and resurrection three times. Each time Jesus foretells his passion, what it will mean for him to be Christ, one of the disciples does/says something showing they don't see what Jesus is talking about. First Peter rebukes Jesus, next the disciples argue about which of them is the greatest and finally, in today's reading, James and John request to sit at the place of power by Jesus. In each of the three cycles when the disciples don't see what it means to be Christ, Jesus reaches out to them again and explains or gives an example: being Christ is losing one's life in order to save it; being Christ means the last will be first; being Christ means greatness is comes from being a slave.

The bookends to this section are the healing of a blind man—two stories that seem similar but are different. In the first story the healing doesn't work fully the first time, blind man doesn't fully see and he says, "The people look like trees." So Jesus gives it another go and it works. In the final bookend, that we read today, the blind man has a name, Bartimaeus. As we look at this story I invite you to keep this question in mind: # "What does it mean to see?"

Bartimaeus is persistent, he wants to see, he shouts out, "Son of David." And when Jesus calls him, throws off his cloak and springs up...dangerous for a blind man... but maybe he thinks it's not dangerous in Jesus presences. Remember how after each passion prediction the disciples make a request of Jesus, asking for status: to be

the greatest, to sit at the seat of power. Bartimaeus requests mercy. He recognizes his need to see. Bartimaeus has an **insight** into who Jesus is different than the disciples. The blind Bartimaeus sees Jesus as the granter of Mercy vs. the granter of privilege. The disciples have physically been with Jesus and physically can see but Bartimaeus is physically blind and hasn't physically spent time with Jesus. Bartimaeus doesn't have light hitting his retina in a way that allows him to see but he does have sight; insight into Jesus. "What does it mean to see?" The disciples can literally see but perhaps for the disciples isn't a simple failure to understand; this isn't just an intellectual disconnection.

Sometimes I can't see. Last night we were at a friend's fiftieth birthday party. We were standing by bar as the twenty or so people gathered and then heading to our table. We were in groups of 2, 3, 4 talking and laughing as my eyes and hearing refocused to scene at the end of the bar, there was another group leaving the bar headed for their table. As they began to walk away the bartender said, "Ma'am would you like me to transfer you tab or pay it now." She turned, I could tell a little embarrassed, and said, "It doesn't matter, I have lots of money." As she turned to walk away my eyes quickly turned to the bartender, in his eyes were the look of shame—not good enough. I could tell he was going to look my way, so I quickly looked down; I couldn't see or I couldn't bear to see, seeing would mean would mean I knew and if I didn't do the right think I might make it worse or maybe I didn't have the courage to step into the arena.

Brene Brown's book *Daring Greatly* sheds light on the disciples encounter and mine; she talks about shame.

Shame is the fear of disconnection. As humans we are psychologically, emotionally, cognitively and spiritually hardwired for connection, love and belonging. Connection is why we are here. Shame is the fear that something we've done or failed to do, an ideal that we've not lived up to makes us unworthy of love and connection. Those ideals that hold us captive to shame are imposed on us by the norms of our culture. Men and women are equally affected by shame but it is organized by gender, by the gender norms of our culture. For women to conform to the norms of our culture they need to: be nice, thin, modest, and use all available resources for appearance. For men: control emotions, work is first, pursue status and violence. First, these aren't Christian values; second, I believe we are moving beyond these norms but they are still amazingly powerful in our lives and they are the basic triggers of shame. If you move outside of these rules/norms expect to get hit.

Examples: In 2009 when Brene Brown gave her first TED talk it went viral within a year it had over four million views and is still today one of the most watched TED talks. When the mean-spirited critics happened they were directed to reinforce those female norms. They came after her appearance and mothering, not her intellect or arguments.

For men the norms boil down to one thing: never be perceived as weak. Brene tells a story of a young man from an interview she did at a college. When he was young he loved art and one day when he was in middle-school he, his dad and uncle were in the kitchen and his uncle pointed at the fridge covered with the boy's artwork

and said, "What, are you raising a sissy?" His dad, who had been ambivalent to his art, quickly put an end to any classes and the young man in Brene's interview said he hadn't done a drawing since that day.

The fear of disconnection—shame—powerfully keeps us inside the boxes and struck in the webs of those norms. It was the same with the disciples. The disciples knew the cultural norms of their day, what they needed to do to avoid shame. Shame is painful and we have a bodily response to shame. The disciples, in their bodies, believed that status and prestige were the path out of shame so much so, that their time with Jesus couldn't change their minds or their physical response to the pain of shame, at least at this point in the story.

The disciples way out of shame is our way out...Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The creator of the universe saying and acting so powerfully making real the statement, "You are enough." # Jesus says over and over again in scripture and lives and dies to show: life isn't about being nice, thin and modest or violent, dominant and to peruse status. We find life in reaching out to one another. We find life in giving. We find life in being our truest selves. And most, maybe all, of the time that requires us to step outside the cultural norms. And that takes courage. It takes vulnerability.

Somehow the blind Bartimaeus could see this. How? By faith. In Luther's explanation to the third article of the creed he says this about faith, "I cannot by my own power of understanding come to faith but it is the Holy Spirit that has called, enlightened and sanctified me and keeps me

in faith.” It is the God of the universe that reaches out to us and holds us, that says over and over again, “You are enough. I made you. I love you. You can do it. Go out there and dare greatly; try, fail and try again. You are worthy of love and connection.”

Our way forward is Jesus. When the disciples tried and failed, Jesus responded with honesty and empathy. Jesus was always clear about the truth and stayed connected to the disciples. Jesus leaned-in continuing to teach and walk with them. Jesus does that today. We learn and experience grace, love and empathy in the community of the saints, here at church and as we encounter God’s love in the world. When we try and fail, either by what we do or fail to do; when we don’t live up to the wholehearted expectations **set by God**—Jesus comes to us again and again with the power of forgiveness and salvation that frees us to go out and continue our work of making the world a more loving place for all. We participate in the work by practicing empathy with those around us.

There another story in Brene’s book but I experienced it firsthand last week. I was in the grocery store Friday and there is a mom with her two kids, one is whining asking to get something, the other is crying/screaming about something. I was in a hurry and their circus was blocking the aisle I needed to get down, so my first inclination was to glare and scoot past, but I had just read Brene’s book where she gives this exact story that is unfolding in front of me as a place to practice empathy. So I inhaled, smiled at the mom, who had a look of desperation and embarrassment on her face, and said, “I’ve been in your

shoes, hang in there.” As I walked on, I started to wonder if I said the right thing or if my smile was funny or... all these other things ran through my head playing the tape, “Boy you screwed that up!” Then I stopped myself and said, “I tried something, I got in the arena, and that’s what matters.”

This week I invite you to get into the arena, with Jesus, cause God is there: see the cultural norms, name that those aren’t your values, and then practice empathy with yourself and others; knowing all along that you are worthy of love and connection, Jesus said, “you are enough.” Amen.