

## Was Blind, but Now We See

*A sermon for the Parish of the Epiphany in Winchester, Massachusetts, preached by the rector,  
the Reverend Thomas J. Brown, on Sunday, 25 October 2009, based upon Mark 10:46-52.*

Last Saturday I was in Rochester, New York, for the funeral of a friend. Debra was only in her 50s, but not all brain tumors can be treated; after a valiant fight, Debra died quietly three weeks ago.

We gathered in this enormous gothic church just before 2:00. I looked at the bulletin and counted: seven eulogies and three opera arias. It was going to be a long afternoon.

The first aria preceded the first eulogy. The soloist, a young man, instead of singing, moved toward the lectern to speak. He was obviously not listed as a eulogist. He was nervous, and then the congregation got nervous. He made it plain that he'd known Debra, and that he had to say somethings before he could sing somethings.

He'd met Debra years earlier when he was a voice student at the Eastman School. To make ends meet he waited table at a restaurant where the waiters were hired as much for their ability to sing as for their skills in serving food. Turned out that Debra and Joe were regular customers at the restaurant, and they'd heard that this young man had been accepted to a program in Italy. They'd also heard that he didn't have the means to pay for it.

At this point in his remarks he was crying pretty openly, and he revealed something that few of us knew: it was Debra who organized the fundraising events that paid for his semester in Italy. And before he sang the first aria he said, "I never saw it coming." Then he sang. He sang and he sang and he sang. If he sings as well as he did last Saturday I can't believe we won't one day hear him at the Met.

But I can't get out of my mind his words, "I never saw it coming." He didn't see the generosity coming. He didn't see the brain tumor coming. We didn't see him coming.

You've heard others say those words in other contexts. The friend who was fired. You've heard, "I never saw it coming" when somebody has lost a lover. Or yourself when your spouse said she wanted a divorce. The family member whose just gotten sober after years of addiction says, "I never saw it coming." Maybe you've said the words; maybe you need to say them.

The unavoidable theme at the center of today's gospel is that seeing is hard, even for so-called sighted people. Bartimaeus is shouting for Jesus, and despite the crowd's attempts to keep him quiet, Bartimaeus persists. Finally, Jesus asks him the same question he asked James and John last week, exactly the same: "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus says, "Let me receive my sight." We say, "I never saw it coming" and Bartimaeus says, "Let me see."

Whoever the people were who decided what stories would be included in our Bible, they carefully placed this one in three of the gospels. Clearly decisions were made about how stories were told, and whether they'd be included at all. This one was crafted to make a point, and then woven into a larger story to make a larger point.

What we can't or won't see may keep us from growing into our full humanity.

What we can't or won't see may make us like blind living in the land of the blind, walking through life without the immense and admirable skill of the physical blind.

What we can't or won't see makes us run into things, and leave in our trail a path of destruction. Sort of like a completely clueless, unconscious driver who roves all over hitting things; running people off the road; utterly unaware.

That's the spiritual blindness that was healed at the center of this story. Bartimaeus could see what others couldn't see. He saw that God could be present in human form. The crowd speaks for us all when we want to deny things. Keep quiet. There are people who absolutely reject the idea that the divine can be encapsulated in the human, that the Word can become flesh. The crowd knew that if the blind man was right, and Jesus was the living child of the living God, then things would change. We'd rather deny the absolute need to change.

There is a story about a pauper who is barefooted and hungry. He looks up to the sky and says to God, "If my eyes look at the sun I'll be blinded" but I pray to you Lord God, let me who is poor, see you. And then God became a piece of bread, and a cup of cool water; a warm tunic; a hut; and in front of the hut a woman nursing an infant.

If we are to identify with the person at the center of this central story we must say, "I didn't see it coming."

I believe God wants us to see, to see the possibility of God, above all else. I think God wants us to know, by sight, that our life can be reshaped, that our burdens of falling short of what we can be or do, can be relieved. I believe God shows us a way to stop crashing around, hurting people, complicating other lives. God shows us a way to be less blind to the possibilities around us.

So that's why we've saved the story and that's why we come back and read it again. God wants to save us by taking us from lost to found, from blind to seeing. Amen.

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