

Bishop's Sermon for Convention Sunday, October 25, 2015

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Convention of the Diocese of West Virginia sends its love and greetings to you. Meeting at Pipestem State Park, we gathered for worship, prayer and some legislative matters.

We have come to have our eyes opened to the awesomeness of God: in our environment, in our lives and in the lives around us. Opening our eyes is an important aspect of living our Christian lives.

In the Gospel today, we hear about blind beggar, Bartimaeus.

No one would have been surprised to see the blind beggar sitting by the roadside outside Jericho. Seeing the blind and poor begging for help was a familiar sight. Even in today's society, street people and the homeless do not regularly make the evening news. They do not draw our attention. If anything, we have become immune to their presence. In fact, it is likely that this beggar would have gone totally unnoticed if he had not cried out to Jesus for help. When they noticed Bartimaeus, those who were walking with Jesus tried to silence the beggar. They did not want to be delayed by a blind man asking for healing and a handout. After all, they believed they

were on an important mission. As the Gospel writer puts it, they were “on the road” with Jesus.

Bartimaeus however, would be not silenced. He continued to call out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me, have mercy on me!” Then Jesus stopped and called to him, saying, “What do you want me to do for you?” To which Bartimaeus answered, “I want to see again.” Jesus replied, “Go your way; your faith has cured you.”: Then the Gospel writer says, “Bartimaeus followed Jesus on the road.”

With a touch of irony, the evangelist draws sharp contrasts between the beggar and the ‘faithful.’

Last week, Our Lord asks the disciples what they want him to do for them, and James and John ask for personal glorification. Given anything in all of creation that they could possibly ask of the Saviour of the World, they ask for personal elevation. The people who walk with Jesus in today’s Gospel, walked with Jesus, but failed to see the real Jesus, to see his real mission.

Those who were following Jesus did not see that the road they were traveling would lead to the cross. Clearly, the followers of Jesus who had eyes to see and ears to hear, could not see or hear the Gospel message.

They could not see that Jesus was on the road to Jerusalem, and his mission and ministry was one of love and compassion for all.

The story of Bartimaeus reminds us, though we hardly need reminding, that many people are sitting by the roadside where we live and work.

There are those countless persons who have been marginalized by a variety of forces. Many are living without adequate food or clothing or a place they can call home.

Some time ago, while serving in a parish that provided overnight shelter, I ran into a group of youngsters who were playing in the halls. They had stacked up cardboard boxes and cartons, and were involved in a 'make-believe' game. When I asked what they were playing, the children replied, "We're playing shelters."

A few months ago, while listening to a radio program, someone started talking about a project they had begun.

His story began by saying that we 'see' the homeless, but we don't 'know' the homeless. We see them sitting out on our sidewalks during the day, but we hardly know what their lives are really like when they go back to their beds. We do not know their lives outside of the sunshine, when we see them on the streets.

So, this man said that he gave many homeless people disposable cameras, and asked them to take pictures of their 'home environment' and to bring the cameras back to him.

They did.

What he saw was a world that was totally unknown to him. Locations that he didn't know existed, were places that they frequented. Beds, campfires, food and people were in these pictures that might as well have been from Mars, as from some place near his home.

I came back to Charleston, and bought about 20 disposable cameras. I have given them all away, and I have received about 5 of them back.

While they are not totally unknown to me, I have seen a side of the homeless of which I was unaware. My eyes have been opened, slightly.

I want to see again!

In recent months, more and more conversation has been taking place regarding addiction. In Huntington, 51 people have died in 2015, due to drug overdoses. More than 600 overdoses have been documented, during the same time period.

I want my eyes opened...not just to see Jesus as Lord, but I want my eyes opened, and the eyes of our congregations, to see the need around us.

We live in a world that is so much different than what we think we grew up in. Addiction, trafficking, poverty at levels that no one could have imagined, human suffering and illiteracy. All these ailments and more, surround us.

We need only have our eyes opened.

Like George Bailey, in "It's a Wonderful Life," standing on the bridge, near the end of the movie, weeping. He has seen all that would have happened without him, and he cries to Clarence, his Angel. Finally he says, "I want to live again." Immediately the snow begins to fall, and he is alive. Life is restored, and he is a changed man.

Bartimaeus says, "I want to see again." His eyes are opened, and he becomes a changed man.

We plead before our Lord, and ask Christ to let our eyes be opened.

Eyes to see him as Lord, and eyes to see the needs around us.

May our vision be so improved, that our hands...our hearts...are opened for the ministry of transforming the world around us. We cannot stand idly by, and close our eyes.

We want to see again!

Amen.