



20/20 Vision—Open Our Eyes “Finding the Way Around the World”

World Communion Sunday
October 6, 2019
Mark 10.46-52
Covenant Presbyterian Church
Madison, WI
Rev. Charlie Berthoud

We are just three months away from the year of perfect vision: 2020. It's time to open our eyes!

Today we begin a four-week series in which we prayerfully ask God to open our eyes individually and as a church, as we journey toward the year 2020.

Our focus scripture comes from Mark's gospel, one of several accounts the gospels where Jesus opened the eyes of a blind person.

The healing of Bartimaeus comes at the conclusion of a long section on discipleship, when Jesus is teaching his followers about what it means to follow him. The section opens and concludes with Jesus healing blind people—so the implication is clear: Following Jesus means seeing things clearly.

As Presbyterians we rightly affirm the sovereignty of God, the idea that God takes the initiative to love us and save us. While this is true, our reading today reminds us of the importance of human initiative, of our making the effort to put ourselves in place for God to heal us, to change us, to renew us.

In short, God's love is strong, but Bartimaeus shows us the importance of perseverance, asking God to help us and guide us.

It's worth noting that Bartimaeus apparently could see at one point. He asks to see again.

One vocabulary note: The Greek word for “made well” is also translated at heal or save.

Listen for the biblical account of Jesus healing blind Bartimaeus.

As Jesus 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 out 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. Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way.

I’ve worn glasses for over 25 years, and while I sometimes joke about my vision not being so great, I have no idea what it is like to be physically blind.

According to International Association to Prevent Blindness, there are something like 35 million blind people in the world, with over 200 million who have serious vision issues. <https://www.iapb.org/vision-2020/who-facts/>

This coming Thursday is actually “World Sight Day”—a time to raise awareness about blindness.

The Christian church has a long history of medical mission work, helping people who are blind. People in this church have been involved in medical mission work, helping people with vision issues. Thanks be to God.

Jesus began his ministry proclaiming the good news, saying that God had sent him to proclaim good news especially to the poor, and among other things to open the eyes of the blind.

Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and **recovery of sight to the blind**, to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

As important as mission work to people who are physically blind is, I think the gospel invites us all to think about our own blindness, our own blind spots, the things we don’t see.

I think Jesus was referring to those who are literally blind and those who are spiritually blind, or perhaps spiritually not quite 20/20.

It's easy for us today to lose sight of what is really important, to get distracted and tempted, so that we look at the wrong things and lose track of God's way.

As I've mentioned other times, in the morning when I put on my glasses, unless I'm rushed or forgetful, I pray: "God help me to see what you want me to see today."

My hope, my prayer, especially this month, is that God would continue to open our eyes to help us as a church see more clearly.

And as you may have realized since we're in a Presbyterian church and it's October, the "open our eyes" series this month is part of our stewardship campaign, which begins this week.

It's the time of year when we start thinking more specifically about our budget, our priorities, our possibilities, our focus for next year, for the year 2020. Sunday October 27 is the day when we ask people to return pledge cards, ministry commitments for 2020. You'll be getting more info about this in the next week or so.

My hope and prayer is that you will see how your generosity, with your money and your time and your prayers and your individual skills, is making a difference—in this church family, in Madison, and around the world.

Your generosity helps to make God's love more real.

Today our focus is on the world, with it being World Communion Sunday. We have connections all across the globe. Your generous support is making a difference all over the world.

We sometimes forget the simple truth, that God loves the world, the whole world.

"For God so loved the world...." (John 3.16)

Remember the song: Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red and yellow black and white, we are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.

God loves the whole world. As God's people, we are called to love those whom God loves.

Presbyterians know this truth and it is reflected in our mission work. We work all over the world in partnership with local people, striving together to serve the Kingdom of God. We try to leave behind a more traditional, arrogant, colonial mindset of us having the truth for the supposedly poor and ignorant people of other countries.

The people who used to be called Missionaries are now Mission Co-Workers, reflecting this idea of partnership and collaboration.

We have learned in our mission work that we all bring gifts together, and so we let our united efforts blend to serve God and serve each other.

And Covenant is supporting God's work all over the world. On this World Communion Sunday, we celebrate our Presbyterian partners around the world.



- GUATEMALA: We support education, healthcare and leadership development, along with Mission Co-Worker Eliane Menezes
- HAITI: We support hospitals and health care through the Medical Benevolence Foundation
- INDONESIA: We support education and reconciliation through Mission Co-Workers Bernie and Farsijana Adeney-Risakotta
- KENYA: We support education, faith formation, and leadership development through Eric Miller, a Presbyterian working with Inter-Varsity
- PERU: We support Young Adult Volunteer programs and environmental justice work being done by Mission Co-Workers Jed and Jenny Koball. Twelve of us were in Peru this summer, journey with Jed and a dozen courageous teen environmentalists.

And SOUTH SUDAN:

SOUTH SUDAN



2011—Independence
2013—Civil War begins

12 million people
Half under age 18
\$300/year/person GDP

Majority Christian



South Sudan is one of the poorest and most distressed places in the world, with years of warfare making things even worse.

We support education and peacemaking, through Mission Co-Worker Leisa Wagstaff (below). And if she looks familiar, you must have been here last summer on the Sunday when she visited Covenant.

The Presbyterian Church of South Sudan is working in dire circumstances to help provide basic education for children.

Several years ago, I remember seeing several photos of school under a tree. But gradually I see things changing.

- Schools are being built
- Classrooms have chairs and desks
- Teachers are getting training and resources
- Kids are learning and growing, figuring out who they are and who they can be.



One of the tragic realities of South Sudan is warfare, in which children have been forced to fight. It's horrible.

The church schools are working for peace and helping children lose their soldier identity and find their identity as children, children of God.

In a recent newsletter from the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan, a former child soldier wrote:

My soul has been weaponized and the rules of it changed my tranquil nature. I began to embrace the title of soldier because I was one; not the doctor,

nurse, teacher that could honor my parents and bring smiles to their faces.... All I can say is that I am a child, not a soldier.

Through your embracing welcome and an understanding smile, I am transformed. I am trying to regain the name 'child' and shake off that of 'soldier.' I am trying to breathe whole again and spend a moment in just feeling free; not lowing my head in shame in front of society. I am liberated and proud to be a child again and this brokenness I have felt is slowly mending. For I am a child and not a soldier.



Girls learning together in South Sudan

Not only is the Presbyterian Church in South Sudan helping former children soldiers, but they are also helping girls get an education.

I read in one of Leisa mission updates that in South Sudan girls have a greater chance of dying in childbirth than finishing primary school. But those statistics are slowly getting better, through the faithful work of Presbyterians in South Sudan.

I'm glad to be part of a church that supports mission work in places like South Sudan.

I'm glad to be part of a church that cares about the world.

I'm glad that we can share World Communion Sunday, with Christians all around the world.

Together we pray "give us this day our daily bread" with the hope that God would feed our stomachs and our souls.

Together we seek peace, the peace of God that passes all understanding.

Together we pray that God would open our eyes anew, giving us clarity about what is really important, so that together we can find the Way. Amen.