

Reflection
October 24, 2021
The Reverend Dr. Phebe L. McPherson
Mark 10:46-52

Jericho. What a beautiful place! *Jesus and His disciples came to Jericho.* It's an oasis in the desert created by copious springs of water in and around the city. It is believed to be one the oldest inhabited cities in the world. Archaeologists have unearthed more than 20 successive settlements in Jericho back as far as 11,000 years ago. It is a special place—perhaps one of those *vortexes* that Spiritualists talk about. We'll come back to that.

Jericho is located in the Jordan Valley--the Jordan River to its east and Jerusalem to the west. It's a refreshing stop along the way to Jerusalem though the roads are steep and treacherous. Going to Jericho is worth the journey. There are gardens and birds and bees and fragrances and honey. It's a resort—a place to re-sort before moving on.

I noticed a card on my desk recently, don't know where I got it—with a quote by John Muir.

*Everybody needs beauty as well as bread
Places to play in and pray in
Where nature may heal and cheer
And give strength to body and soul alike.*

John Muir is known as "Father of the National Parks." He was a naturalist, environmental philosopher, botanist, zoologist, glaciologist, and early advocate for the preservation of wilderness in the United States of America. Jericho is his kind of place!

A place for healing and cheer, giving strength to body and soul.

Jesus and his disciples stayed in Jericho on their way to Jerusalem. A place and a time away. A place and a time apart. A place and time to be refreshed. To play and pray. A place and time to be strengthened—an intentional pause before taking on the plans and

purposes that were awaiting them in Jerusalem. Enter Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus. He was also in Jericho to be touched, healed, renewed—to be restored—it was for him a place of hope and opportunity—perhaps even to see again.

Bruce and I just got back from Sedona, Arizona where we spent a few days in early October. It was the first time we were able to get away since Covid put an end to travel. Sedona is a stunningly beautiful place, a series of canyons, surrounded by magnificent red rocks and known as a spiritual vortex to new-age healers. Spiritual vortexes are said to be cross-points between energy fields in the earth's grid system. Vortexes are said to assist in aligning spiritual properties, bringing together the pieces and parts of our spiritual make up to create balance and harmony in the body. We went for the opportunity to rest and be restored. It doesn't take long in such a beautiful place. We went to a few lectures about healing and creativity and even dream-work—and discovered that everyone was there for the same purpose. All Bartimaeus'—looking for opportunities to be touched, healed, renewed, restored.

Bartimaeus blindness happens in many different ways. Sometimes it is the darkness of grief, sorrow, and loss. I am not immune to the losses and grief we've experienced in this community in the past year and in the past few months. *Bartimaeus blindness*. Sometimes guilt and regret blinds us to what our life could be. We all struggle in one way or another. Sometimes we live in the darkness of fear, anger, or resentment. Doubt and despair can distort and impair our vision. Failures, disappointments, and shattered dreams can darken our world. Temporarily or over a life-time. In a dream-group we attended, a woman volunteered to share a recurring dream she has—a nightmare for over 20 years. It went something like this:

- ~ She doesn't get a school assignment done.
- ~ A teacher and coach laughs at her.
- ~ Only one friend stands by her.

We were encouraged to ask her a few questions. Recalling the details of her nightmare she began to make connections—which led to a moment of stark awakening. And there were tears as she recalled the physical abuse she suffered as a high school student and

athlete. Throughout her life, shame and guilt eroded her sense of self-worth and damaged her close relationships. *Bartimaeus blindness*. There are times when we hide among the shadows neither wanting to see nor to be seen. Perhaps the deepest darkness is when we become lost to ourselves—not knowing who we are or able to enjoy the beauty of our creation and existence. Darkness and blindness can fill and cover us in a thousand different ways.

The disciples ordered Bartimaeus to be quiet but he cried out even more loudly—“Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus said, “Call him here.” Throwing off his cloak—throwing all caution to the wind—the first to volunteer, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “Teacher, let me see again.” The deeper question is whether Bartimaeus (and the rest of us) really want to see.

- ~ Do we really want to see the truth of our lives?
- ~ Do we really want to see the needs of our neighbor, the poor,
or the marginalized?
- ~ Do we really want to see the injustices of the world?
- ~ Do we really want to see who Jesus is and what he asks of us?

“Do you really want to see?” That’s the question all Bartimaeus’ must answer. Seeing can be painful at first. It is much more than simply observing with our physical eyes. It requires deeper knowing and understanding. It requires courage and faith—meaning a trust in God to do with us and for us what we really need most. It means “God isn’t done with you yet.” *Jesus is, and His Church is called to be*—an oasis in the desert with springs of living water. *Jesus is, and His Church is called to be*—a beautiful place revealing and inspiring who we are meant to be and who we can become. *Jesus is, and his Church is called to be*—where we play and pray, and in doing so, strengthen body and soul. *Jesus is, and His Church is called to be*— the Way God touches, heals, renews—even restores us. *Jesus is and His Church is called to be*—a spiritual vortex bringing together the broken pieces and parts to create balance and harmony and peace. We are to be a Church that is

- an oasis in the desert*
- God’s dream for humankind*

—a vortex of hope and opportunity
—a beautiful place where all are welcome to return, recenter,
and be restored for the journey ahead.

Jesus said to Bartimaeus, “Your trust and your courage has made you well.” Immediately Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed Jesus on the Way.

AMEN.