

***Holy Interruptions – Help Us to See!@***

**Jeremiah 31:7-9; Mark 10:46-52**

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Charlotte started going blind while she was in high school in the 1940's. She was a close friend of my mothers, and mom told me how she remembered Charlotte, a young girl who loved the things girl's love – pretty clothes and jewelry – how she laid out her favorite sweaters of different colors on her bed. She told mom she just wanted to take it all in and remember the things she loved.

As she grew older, Charlotte learned that there were even more important things to keep in her memory. She married, and had a couple of children before she was completely blind, so she had the blessing of knowing what her children and husband looked like when she did completely lose her sight.

Charlotte was amazing. She sang in the choir with her husband at the Presbyterian Church. He would tell her the words to the song, and she would hear the alto part from others, during practice on Wednesday evenings, and she was able to sing the anthem with the choir, every single Sunday.

Charlotte had another child, Petey, whom she had not seen from the time he was born. She knew his features only by touching his sweet face and hearing the description from others.

There was an ophthalmologist who came to town, who had been studying the eye disorder that Charlotte had, and he told her one day that he believed he could correct her eye problem and help her to see again, if she was willing to try the surgery.

It was a new procedure. And, he told her that they would not be able to remove the bandages for several days, and that complete healing would take weeks, and during that time she would have to be very careful; she would have to keep her emotions in check, because crying could cause damage during that crucial healing period. Charlotte agreed.

So, Charlotte had the surgery and was in that healing process when her husband – who had been such a great help to her for years – came to her hospital room after the surgery and confessed that he had been seeing another woman and that he wanted a divorce. You can imagine the emotional upheaval Charlotte experienced, a woman who had just had surgery to heal her blindness, whose eyes were bandaged, and who dared not shed a tear!

When the doctor later removed the bandages, Charlotte could see! Her vision was not clear and sharp, but she could hold her little boy and see his face for the very first time. But maybe, now, Charlotte saw even more than just her son and all the people in front of her, and the objects around her. In that process of healing, now maybe sadly, she

saw the husband she thought she knew in a whole different way. She saw clearly who he had become. I wonder if her husband acted out in fear of the unknown, fear of Charlotte really seeing his life, seeing the truth. I wonder if he was uncertain of how life would be in this new way of living. Perhaps he needed some new vision himself.

Charlotte and her husband divorced and she lived, and managed with her children, on her own. She went back to college and learned some new skills and got a job.

Our story in Mark today is also about someone whose life was changed as his sight was restored. It is a story of Jesus, still heading to Jerusalem, going through the city of Jericho. As usual, a great crowd of people were following Jesus and his disciples. There must have been much talking and noise. But Jesus hears a cry somewhere in the crowd – another interruption on the way to the cross.

“Jesus! Son of David! Please, have mercy on me.” It was a man named Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, who sat at the side of the road. Mark tells us he is Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, which is kind of funny, if you think about it.

In Hebrew, the word *Bar* means “son of.” So Bartimaeus means, “Son of Timaeus.” So, really, Mark is saying there was a man name Son of Timaeus, who is the son of Timaeus.”

A fun little play on words.

The people surrounding him, scold the Son of Timaeus, Son of Timaeus, and tell him to be quiet, don't bother Jesus. He's in a hurry. Leave him alone. Let him be on his way. He has more important things to worry about than a blind beggar. A sinner. A son of Timaeus.

But, Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, somehow knows that this could be a chance for change, and he won't be silenced. And Jesus, even in the noise of the crowd, hears this voice and comes to a stand still on the way out of town. He asks for people to bring Bartimaeus to him.

And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart (Bart); get up, he is calling you.”

So, throwing off his cloak, Bartimaeus sprang up and was led to Jesus.

Then Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

And Bartimaeus said to Jesus, “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.

Bartimaeus threw off the one thing he seemed to own, his cloak, jumped up and went to Jesus. And although Jesus did not even ask him to follow him – he just told him to “go on his way” - Bartimaeus was now compelled to follow Jesus. He couldn’t see anything better than that!

Maybe, like Charlotte, he saw more than just the man standing in front of him, or the crowd looking surprised at his healing. Maybe he saw more than the trees and the sky and the beauty of the day.

When his eyes were opened, maybe he saw love and acceptance – something he had not experienced as a blind beggar, as a person others considered a sinner – otherwise, why would he be blind in the first place?

Maybe he even saw himself as a valued human being in the eyes of Jesus, the healer, the one who opens eyes and transforms lives; the one who loves completely and perfectly.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God.”

I started wondering, as I was thinking about all these holy interruptions Jesus had on his way to the cross – important, meaningful encounters with people who needed to see Jesus – how often do we, Jesus’ followers, have interruptions that we ignore?

How many times are those interruptions, interruptions by God, as Bonhoeffer said?

And even if we stop and pay attention, are we irritated at the interruption? I began to wonder about all the people along our way who are blind and need to see; who are hurting and need reassurance.

And then I wondered – in what way I might be blind?

And, as I thought about Jeremiah and all the people – the remnants left from the exile – those whom the Lord God spoke to through Jeremiah, telling those exiled people who had been driven from their homes and their homeland that God would gather them up and bring them home and they would be beloved children of God again – I thought about the hundreds of thousands of people who are in exile right now.

Refugees, who are fleeing death from their enemies who have taken over their country; and, what about the men and women, right here in our own country, (in their own country) who have been in a place of exile – who have fought for equality, who have longed to feel, who have been taught wrongly that they are not loved but are

condemned, not valued as a human being, but somehow are less ... so many people of color, and gender, social class, and others, who have been cast out because of fear and hatred, not just by society, but sometimes from the church, which seems to think we can speak for God.

I have witnessed, at times in the past, good, Christian people who have looked down their noses at anyone who came seeking a church family; congregations who would not extend a hand of welcome because a person was of a different working class, or color, or whatever else made them different. These were people who truly considered themselves to be friendly and caring.

They were blind, but unlike the Son of Timaeus, Son of Timaeus, they were not even willing to cry out for Jesus to help them see. They were so blind they did not even see that they were blind!

If we are so closed minded that we are not open to having the Lord of Love and Life open our eyes, then our faith cannot possibly make us well, as Jesus said, because our faith is in a god that doesn't exist – unless we look in the mirror.

We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God, Bonhoeffer said. But we must also be ready to allow ourselves to have our eyes open by the Healer so that we can see what He wants us to see. And I can't help but think He wants us to see others with the same love that He sees them with.

Sadly, I must tell you the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey used to say. Charlotte's sight only lasted a few years, but she was so thankful for the years of seeing that she did have. And she gave God all the glory, for even the short time she had been helped to see life in new ways. For that sight was not subject to change, even as her eyes deteriorated once again. Charlotte Sanford remained a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, giving Him the glory and being a witness to his healing, loving grace.

Let us never cling to blindness – a blindness that not only affects our eyes, but our hearts as well. Let us cry out to Jesus "Lord, we want to see!" and let us rejoice as he opens our eyes to new things; to new ways of accepting and loving, and welcoming those who have been in exile back into the family of God where they belong.

May our prayer sincerely be for Jesus to open our eyes that we may see, glimpses of truth you have for us. "O God, soften our cold, hard hearts. Loosen our stiff necks. Help us to have eyes that really see. Help us to know it's not all about me, but about US, together, as your Body. Help us to follow your greatest commandment...to love others as we love ourselves."

Amen.