

“Wanting to See Again”

Mark 10:46-52 – October 25, 2009

INTRO: On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus travels through Jericho, about 15 miles from Jerusalem. There he encounters Bartimaeus, a blind man, sitting by the roadside. Bartimaeus didn't have the use of his eyes, yet he could see something in Jesus, that even his followers weren't able to see. He turns to Jesus for help, believing Jesus had the power to change his life.

For some, this page from the newspaper, has become more important to them in the past year—it's the daily markets roundup. Some people have been watching more closely what their stocks and mutual funds have been doing. For many of us, we may have been paying more attention to these credit card statements and our check book ledgers. (And yes, I know this is the old-fashioned way to balance my checkbook, but it works for me.) We're looking more closely at those reports, because the economy and our financial realities have moved us to be more concerned.

Many in our society have succumbed to what Adam Hamilton calls affluenza—no it's not something you can guard against with a flu shot. “Affluenza is the constant need for more and bigger and better stuff—as well as the effect that this need has on us. It is the desire to acquire, and most of us have been infected by this virus to some degree.” *(Enough)*

The average American home went from 1,660 square feet in 1973 to 2,400 square feet in 2006. Today there is estimated to be 1.9 billion square feet of self-storage space in our country. *(Enough)*

There's probably not a one of us here today, that doesn't know of someone who is trying to figure out what to do with all their stuff, including the belongings they've inherited from a parent or a great aunt and the childhood trappings of young adults who left them behind.

The other illness that Adam Hamilton proposes we've succumbed to, is “credit-itis—an illness that is brought on by the opportunity to buy now and pay later. It feeds on our desire for instant gratification. Our economy is built on credit-it is. Unfortunately, it has exploited our lack of self-discipline and allowed us to feed our affluenza, wreaking havoc in our personal and national finances.” *(Enough)*

We hear the TV announcer say that whatever you spend on furniture at their store, you get dollar for dollar back, to spend on more furniture. And we may think that is an incredible deal. The average credit card debt in our country in 1990 was around \$3000 and currently it's at \$7,861 per household.

If we use a credit card to pay for something, the average sale is around 125% higher, than if we pay cash, because it doesn't feel real when we use plastic instead of cash. *(Enough)*

I've had the experience, of buying something on-line, and because there may be more than one thing on sale, I keep looking around the site, realizing I'm already paying for shipping, so I might as well put more things in that box, which will be paid for by my little piece of plastic. It's far too easy at that moment. And it by-passes the sense you have of handing money over to a clerk—money you took out of your billfold, that won't be there when you finish the transaction.

“*Credit* comes from the Latin word, *credo*, which means ‘I believe’ or ‘I trust.’ To extend credit to someone is to believe or trust that he or she will repay. As Christians, our *credo* or trust is in God.” *(Enough)*

At some level we know that our trust needs to be placed in God, not in money or financial systems. But we may not be able to see there are spiritual reasons for making that change in attitudes that could affect our money management.

Today's story about Bartimaeus is about a blind man. Perhaps the idea of blindness could be a metaphor for us, as we look at our need for spiritual growth when it comes to money and finances. We need to know that blindness can mean different things to different people. There's a story about a Mrs. Smith who had removed her clothes and was just about to step into the shower when the doorbell rang. She hollered, "Who is it?" He shouted back, "It's the blind man." She figured it was safe, so she opened the door. He looked at her in shock and asked, "Where do you want me to hang these blinds, lady?"

Bartimaeus may have not had the ability to see with his eyes, that's one way of being blind. And we may not be able to see clearly, even if our eyesight is 20/20, when it comes to how we deal with our money.

The story of Bartimaeus leads us to believe that he once could see, but now can't. And Jesus finds him seated by the roadside, begging for coins for food. Bartimaeus asks Jesus for help.

“Blindness was a very common disease in Jesus’ day. It was primarily caused by a water duct, located beneath the eyelids, which dried up. The eyes and eyelids then became puffy and swollen. This kind of blindness was spread by flies and was aggravated by the hot desert sun and the desert sands. The contemporary scientific name for this disease is ‘ophthalmic conjunctivitis’ which we still find in people in developing countries.” (Kurt Aland)

Bartimaeus is persistent in trying to get Jesus’ attention, and we have Jesus asking the same basic question he asked of James and John in last week’s reading: “What do you want me to do for you?” Yet Bartimaeus’ response was a much different response than that of the two brothers last week, who basically wanted notoriety for themselves. There’s was a kind of spiritual blindness.

Bartimaeus is dealing with physical blindness, and quickly responds with: “Let me see again.” He remembers being able to see, and wants that again. For Bartimaeus, “seeing” functions symbolically as well as literally. He recognized Jesus as his master, in a way others didn’t.

“He had a clear focus on the one thing he wanted most in all the world, together with his keen anticipation that Jesus could and would grant it. These are attitudes and actions that Jesus calls ‘faith.’ Bartimaeus didn’t secretly cherish his infirmity, he wanted to be healed. And his healing is testimony to the power of Jesus to restore and make well, those who know they are blind.” (Lamar Williamson)

Bartimaeus had great hope and great trust, so much so, that he was able to toss aside his coat, the garment he would place on the ground so people could throw their coins his way, he took off this security blanket and raced up to Jesus for healing.

“Physical sight is not required for discipleship, but restoration is. Again and again, God works miracles and (impossibilities and healings) through ordinary living, to pick us up from where we have fallen and redirect us along better pathways.” (Mary Anderson)

Bartimaeus, as a poor beggar, knew he couldn’t see. His life was lived in poverty. Yet we, who in the world’s standards, are relatively affluent, may not yet recognize we need God’s help. We don’t know or fail to admit that we aren’t seeing clearly.

“Our souls were created in the image of God, but they have been distorted. We were meant to desire God, but we have turned that desire toward possessions. We were meant to find our security in God, but we find it in amassing wealth. We were meant to love people, but instead we compete with them. We were meant to enjoy the simple pleasures of life, but we busy ourselves with pursuing money and things. We were meant to be generous and to share with those in need, but we selfishly hoard our resources for ourselves.” (Enough)

Those are the spiritual issues beneath our affluenza and crediti-itis. Those are some of the ways we experience a kind of blindness. And when we keep not really looking at those issues, we don’t tap into the resources that might help us and redirect us. When we simply go along with our life’s purpose as defined by society, to consume—to make and spend as much money as possible, we miss seeing God’s real purpose for us—a life purpose that’s greater than our own self-interests. The blue bulletin insert today, helps us to think about our life’s purpose and goals. To reflect and write some of our thoughts.

In addition, you find in your bulletins today, a plastic mirror or window cling. These Six Financial Planning Principles are meant to help us manage our money with wisdom and faith perspectives. The principles are:

1. Pay our tithe and offering first. Instead of paying all our other bills, we could put God first in our living and our giving. Instead of giving to the ministry of the church from what is left, we make that one of our priorities.
2. Create a budget and track our expenses. Creating a budget is just developing a plan in which we tell our money what we want it to do. Tracking our expenses with a budget is like getting on the scales: It allows us to see how we are doing and motivates us to be more careful with our spending. Also included in today’s bulletin is a basic budget worksheet, suggesting possible percentages of our total budget for each item. To use this worksheet, you would fill in what percentage of your budget you actually spend (on the left side) and then propose what your plan is for the next year, if those percentages are way out of kilter.
3. Simplify our lifestyle (live below our means). In a couple weeks, on Nov. 8th, I’ll say more about this one, because this is so important to any financial plan.
4. Establish an emergency fund. This is an account that’s separate from checking or long-term

savings, that is set aside specifically for emergencies. Just start putting money into this fund, and try to build it up to three months' worth of income. When you have this kind of fund, it will cut down on the need to use credit cards for emergencies.

5. Pay off our credit cards, use cash/debit cards for purchases and use credit cards wisely. Some experts suggest starting with the credit card that has the highest interest rate. Others suggest paying down the smallest debt first. If you must use a credit card, be sure to pay off the debt monthly. And if you are unable to do this, then cut up the cards and stop using them.
6. Practice long-term savings and investing habits. Saving money is the number-one wise money management principle. *(Enough)*

"To allow Jesus to open our eyes fully, what change might be required of us?" *(Catherine McElhinney)*
God wants us to say truthfully in our hearts, "I want to see again." I think deep down, we know there's a better way to live, than the patterns we may have gotten stuck in. Deep down, we've lost an ability that we may have had at some point, to see more clearly the realities of our lives and be honest. Many of us can remember older family members, who had different patterns of spending and saving—we still have that memory. Perhaps we need to look at those patterns and see what we might learn from them that could be helpful.

And "we need to ask for the gift of seeing—of seeing the truth, or lack of it in our own lives, and then of taking the action necessary to reverse our blindness." *(Fr. Gerry Pierse)*

We can't all return to 20/20 eyesight, or to perfect hearing, or to the hopes and dreams we had on our wedding day, or the goals we had upon graduating from college. But, I would hope that we wouldn't get stuck, stuck in our past mistakes or our piled up debts, or ways of operating that just aren't working well for us.

Bartimaeus' story reminds us that our sight can be improved, that we can experience a sense of wholeness. Jesus can handle the truth of our lives, and in sharing that truth, we may we well on our way to healing. For: "God doesn't solve our problems for us, God solves them with us." *(Sam Williams)*

--Sue Burwell