

24th October 2021 – Morning Service

Seeing is believing

Rev Andrew Roberts

Call to Worship

Come O Lord, give us your Spirit; come O Lord into our lives.

Come O Lord, open our hearts to receive your word. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Come, Spirit, come.

StF 59 – Lord the light of your love is shining

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| 1) Lord, the light of Your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us,
Set us free by the truth You now bring us,
Shine on me, shine on me. | 2) Lord, I come to Your awesome presence,
From the shadows into Your radiance;
By the blood I may enter Your brightness,
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me, shine on me. |
| <i>Ch) Shine, Jesus, shine,
Fill this land with the Father's glory;
Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow,
Flood the nations with grace and mercy;
Send forth Your word, Lord,
And let there be light.</i> | 3) As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
So our faces display Your likeness,
Ever changing from glory to glory,
Mirrored here may our lives tell Your story.
Shine on me, shine on me. |

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Prayers

Lord the light of your love is shining and we are honoured that you call us into your presence.

And so we come ready to worship, ready to learn from you.

May we have eyes open to see you, hearts willing to be seen by you and wills ready to serve you.

Forgive us we pray for the times when we prefer darkness to light, when we close our eyes and hearts to those in need, when we prefer our way to your way.

Come to us afresh now we pray, by your Holy Spirit, to restore your holiness within us that in all we are and do we may live and worship and work to your praise and glory. **Amen.**

StF 322 – How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

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| 1) How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away our fear. | 4) Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King,
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring. |
| 2) It makes the wounded spirit whole,
And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary, rest. | 5) Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought;
But when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought. |
| 3) Dear name - the rock on which I build,
My shield and hiding-place,
My never-failing treasury, filled
With boundless stores of grace! | 6) Till then I would thy love proclaim
With every fleeting breath;
And may the music of thy name
Refresh my soul in death. |

John Newton CCL No. 515642

Reading: Mark 10:46-52

They came to Jericho. As he 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 him on the way.

StF 545 – Be thou my vision

- 1) Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
Be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
Be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
Both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.
- 2) Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
Be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
Be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.
- 3) Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
Be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
Be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.
- 4) Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
Be thou mine inheritance now and always, -
Be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.
- 5) High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after vict'ry is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish, 8th Century translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne CCL No. 515642

Address – Seeing

Jesus said to Bartimaeus, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' (Mark 10:51)

In Mark's gospel blind people are important exemplars of faith, of what it is to be a follower, a friend, a disciple of Jesus. Mark's gospel is formed of a number of sections, all of which begin with stories or teaching about what it is to be a follower, a friend, a disciple of Jesus. Early in the section from which today's reading is taken, there is a story of the healing of a blind man (Mark 8.22-26), immediately before Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah in response to Jesus' question: 'Who do you say I am?' Just as the blind man was enabled to see physically, so Peter is enabled to see spiritually. Now, as the section draws to a close, we have a second story about the healing of a blind man. Like Peter, Bartimaeus is able to identify Jesus as more than just another inspirational rabbi. He identifies Jesus as 'the Son of David' - a Messianic title (v.47).

In Mark's gospel in particular, we repeatedly see Jesus' disciples misunderstanding or getting discipleship wrong. They squabble over prestige and power; they fall asleep or disappear when Jesus needs them most. But Bartimaeus, the outsider, the one people thought couldn't see, so therefore couldn't understand, is the one who gets it right and he follows Jesus along the road to Jerusalem, to David's city.

Bartimaeus was healed by Jesus and had his sight restored. Today through the miracles of medicine and prayer there are many who have the joy of physical sight being restored. But there are many others – including deeply faithful people - who do not have that experience and either remain sightless or experience blindness. One such person was John Hull. John was a professor of religious education and a bible scholar.

For many years he was on the staff at Queens College in Birmingham where he trained many a Methodist Minister. While a professor and when his children were young, he became blind. For Hull, blindness was a journey into a different world. In 1997 he wrote a book called 'On Sight and Insight' in which he explored how blind people are both independent and dependent. And again, there is something about discipleship in this. As followers of Jesus, we are set free from the power of sin. Set free to explore and enjoy life in all its fullness. Set free to serve others and to honour God. But paradoxically at the same time we are called into a mutual interdependence with God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with one another within the fellowship of the church and, as we are becoming increasingly aware, with all of the created order that we have divine responsibility to care for.

Hull explores the place of insight and again this is an often-overlooked aspect of faith and discipleship. The writer to the Hebrews understood this when saying '*faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*'. (Hebrews 11:1).

I wonder who are the insightful ones in your fellowship, your Church? How well do we listen to them? So far, we have been thinking about seeing as a facet of discipleship. In a moment we will think about seeing as the essence of leadership. But just before we do let's just notice the importance of helping others see Jesus. The place of seeing as an act of witness.

In verse 47 of chapter 10, Mark says it was '*when Bartimaeus heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth*' that he calls out to Jesus. Which means that someone who could see told him that Jesus was there. These days via Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat or whatever we love to celebrate and share what we are seeing with others. We introduce people to everything from our lunch to our grandchildren. How often do we help people to see the Jesus we follow?

In the majestic prologue to the fourth gospel John writes '*the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth*.' (John 1:14). Here the evangelist is bearing witness to what he has seen. We are called to do the same. So, seeing speaks to us of discipleship and witness and then it is also a powerful biblical motif for leadership.

Speaking on our text at a Fresh Expressions Conference in Oxford the then Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams focussed on the cry of Bartimaeus '*Let me see again*' and went on to argue persuasively that leadership is all about helping people to see.

- To see their potential.
- To see a vision of possibilities and how those possibilities can be realised.
- To see dangers and damage and address them.
- To see risks and assess them.
- And as those who lead in the name of Christ to see Jesus and his vision of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

In his autobiography the footballer Ian Wright speaks movingly of Sydney Pigden, a teacher at the primary school he attended in Brockley, south east London. What stands out is Sydney's belief in Ian. When Ian's home was an abusive place, the streets awash with racism and school was not serving him well at all, Sydney saw Ian's potential and encouraged him to see that for himself.

I wonder how do we see others? Do we just see their problems or do we see their potential? Do we write them off as no-hopers or give them hope and something, and indeed someone, to believe in? And how in these trying times do we see our Churches? Do we see them through the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia and pine for what they once were or do we see the new things that God is calling us to be and do? To be hope bearers in a broken and very fragile world. Do we humbly need to pray Bartimaeus' prayer, Jesus 'let me see again.'

In closing let's take a moment to dwell with the amazing question that Jesus asks Bartimaeus 'What do you want me to do for you?' Do we have time in our lives for such moments? Moments when we stop and listen for the voice of Jesus, for the questions and calls of Jesus. Or are we always 'No time to stop and stare'? No time to see with God's eyes and wonder? No time to listen, as Jesus did, for the heartfelt cry? Or no time to hear Jesus asking us as he asked Bartimaeus that amazing, gracious, generous question 'What do you want me to do for you?'

And when we do hear that question, how would we answer?

We could a lot worse than answer as Bartimaeus answered 'let me see again.'

- Let me see your love for me.
- Let me see all that I can be as your disciple.
- Let me see those you call me to love and serve.
- Let me see your vision of Heaven on Earth and how that can be.

Or in the words of that ancient prayer of Richard of Chichester

May I know Thee more clearly, Love Thee more dearly, Follow Thee more nearly. Amen.

StF 706 – Longing for light

1) Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see.

*Ch) Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

2) Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.

3) Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed.

4) Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone.

5) Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come.

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Prayers of Thanksgiving & Intercession

Lord, we pray for all those sitting in darkness, those who feel that they have little to offer, those who cannot see light in the night that they currently endure. We ask for the candle in their hearts to be relit, and for us and others around them to be inspired to help them, to intervene and intercede on their behalf.

L: Have mercy on us Lord and **R: have mercy on your world.**

We pray for those who are unsure of the way ahead, who struggle to discern the right thing to do. Give them insight and wisdom, that they may perceive the right course of action and understand what is needed.

L: Have mercy on us Lord and **R: have mercy on your world.**

We pray for those who have been hindered by unhelpful or untrue expectations, asking that you would untangle the muddle that they find themselves in, and allowing them to see your truth and grace.

L: Have mercy on us Lord and **R: have mercy on your world.**

We ask in the name of the living Christ. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the
glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are
yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 440 – Amazing grace

- 1) Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.
- 2) God's grace has taught my heart to fear,
His grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.
- 3) Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
God's grace has brought me safe thus far,
And he will lead me home.
- 4) The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.
- 5) And, when this heart and flesh shall fail
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil
A life of joy and peace.
- 6) When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

John Newton CCL No. 515642

Closing prayer & Blessing

Lord, may we look out into your world with your eyes, listen with your ears, and speak and love in your name. May it be so. **Amen.**

And so may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and this world that God loves, this day and forever more. **Amen.**