

Year B

Mark 10:46-52

In his book, *Catching the Light*, quantum physicist Arthur Zajonc (Zye-unts) wrote of what he describes as the "entwined history of light and mind".

From both animal and human studies, we know there are critical developmental "windows" in the first years of life. Sensory and motor skills are formed, and if this early opportunity is lost, trying to play catch up is hugely frustrating and mostly unsuccessful.

Prof. Zajonc (Zye-unts) wrote of studies which investigated recovery from congenital blindness. Thanks to cornea transplants, people who had been blind from birth would suddenly have functional use of their eyes. Nevertheless, success was rare. Referring to one young boy, "the world does not appear to the patient as filled with the gifts of intelligible light, colour, and shape upon awakening from surgery," Zajonc (Zye-unts) observed, light and eyes were not enough to grant the patient sight. "The light of day beckoned, but no light of mind replied within the boy's anxious, open eyes."

Zajonc (Zye-unts) quoted from a study by a Dr. Moreau who observed that while surgery gave the patient the "power to see," "the employment of this power, which as a whole constitutes the act of seeing, still has to be acquired from the beginning." Dr. Moreau concludes, "To give back sight to a congenitally blind person is more the work of an educator than of a surgeon." To which Zajonc (Zye-unts) added, "The sober truth remains that vision requires far more than a functioning physical organ. Without an inner light, without a formative visual imagination, we are blind," he explained. That "inner light"

-- the light of the mind -- "must flow into and marry with the light of nature to bring forth a world."¹

We might not expect this principal section of Mark's Gospel ending before the account of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, to detail the simple story of a blind man being healed by Jesus. There are many accounts of Jesus healing in the Gospels and we are accustomed, quite rightly, to read these healing stories as an example of the compassionate response of Christ to human need. And here it is no different. Jesus

¹ National Right to Life News, March 30, 1993, p. 22.

responded to the longing of Bartimaeus to see, by commending his faith and healing him. But there is so much more here than that. This story has been chosen by the compiler of the Gospel narrative to end a major section of the story and so we would expect to find more going on and indeed there is!

What is the common denominator in the texts from Mark's Gospel that we have been looking at in recent weeks? Is it not the inability of the disciples, those closest to Jesus, to actually *see* what is going on? Remember that Jesus stated that the Son of

Man will undergo suffering, rejection and death only to have Peter sternly rebuke him. Jesus announced that the Son of Man will be betrayed into human hands, leaving his disciples confused and afraid to inquire further. Mark portrayed Jesus' disciples debating about who would be the greatest, with James and John jockeying for position at the right and left hand of Jesus while the other disciples expressed anger at them for their arrogance. The Bartimaeus story serves as the culmination of this section of Mark's Gospel because Jesus confronted not only the physical blindness of Bartimaeus

but, more significantly, the spiritual blindness of his closest followers who have failed to fully grasp the upside-down kingdom that Christ has brought near to the world. Here the surface story of physical blindness is presented as the top layer of a deeper spiritual blindness that is affecting all around. So much blindness - all around...

So to Bartimaeus, the blind man, who actually *sees* already! What did Bartimaeus call Jesus? The Son of Man? - that's the prevalent ascription to this point in Mark's Gospel. No, he called him 'The Son of David'. This is exactly what the crowd will proclaim

when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, recorded in the following chapter. Bartimaeus was able to see what others could not to that point in the story. But that's only part of it because Jesus later in his temple sermon in chapter twelve will deny that the Messiah is the Son of David. Note that Mark records that Bartimaeus regained his sight and *followed* him on his way. This is in contrast to the other healing stories in Mark's Gospel when the healed were sent away with the command to remain silent. In other words, Bartimaeus joined the disciples as they proceeded to Jerusalem. Even though his

sight was restored he was now joining the blind throng as they followed Jesus in darkness towards his death. That blind throng will eventually be scattered like sheep with no shepherd. Jesus will die, and those who thought that they could truly see Jesus will discover in Jesus' death that they did not see after all. The disciples will return to Galilee defeated.

But, and this is key, the story did not end there. Remember the young man dressed in a white robe who told the group of women that Jesus had risen? He said; "Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of

you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”² If the death of Jesus revealed the blindness of his followers, the resurrection of Jesus gave his followers eyes to see the good news of God’s reign.

Sylvester Stallone shot to fame in the movie *Rocky*. But Stallone’s own story is as inspiring as that of the character he played. His slurred speech and snarling look are the result of a facial nerve that was severed during his birth and his early years were spent bouncing between foster families in the infamous Hells Kitchen area. An outcast at

² Mark 16:7

school thanks to his facial deformities, he was sent to a high school for troubled children. After school Stallone went to college, but left to turn his attention to acting. He didn't meet with much success. He worked at a deli throughout most of his twenties and before *Rocky* made him a star was so broke that he was forced to sell his dog, to which he was so attached, for \$25, to sell his wife's jewellery, and he ended up living in a bus shelter.

His break came when he went to a boxing match in which an unknown underdog Chuck Wepner took the world champion

Muhammed Ali to 15 rounds. Stallone went home and in three days wrote the first draft of *Rocky*. When he started hawking it around to the studios there was immediate interest. They saw the script as a great vehicle for a big star – names such as Robert Redford and Burt Reynolds were thrown around – and offered to buy the script. But Stallone wasn't selling, not unless he was given the lead. The studios kept offering more, on the condition Stallone didn't act in the movie. Each time Stallone refused, even when \$325,000 was put on the table, the highest amount ever

offered for a script. Despite having just \$106 in the bank Stallone wouldn't give up.

"I knew that if I took the money I'd regret it for the rest of my life," said Stallone. "And the picture was about taking that golden shot when you finally get it."

The studio eventually gave in, buying the script for \$35,000, with Stallone to work as a writer without a fee and as an actor for award wages. Stallone got the lead role and the movie was reduced to low budget production.

The rest is history. *Rocky* was a massive hit, won an Oscar for best picture and Stallone became a star.

Vision or sight is absolutely critical to a true understanding of the good news of God's kingdom. May our eyes be open this day.

Amen.