



The 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time (28 October 2018)

Jer 31.7-9; Ps 128; Heb 5.1-6; Mk 10:46-52

Theme: Hoping to reach for Home

A hopeful return to their homeland was Jeremiah's prophesy to the Israelites who were in exile and assures G-d's presence in Israel because he is their father – *Abba*. If we scrutinize *Abba* in Hebrew, each of the letters (in Kabbalah) creates a consolidated meaning, the *aleph* means “strength” or “leader”, while the *bet* means “household”. Taken together, could also mean that G-d, their strength will lead them home, or with G-d, they have a strong sense of home. What has such understanding to do with our gospel today?

The story of Bartimeus is commonly taken as healing, or Jesus who took pity towards the blind or blindness read as a metaphor. Focusing merely on the physical or sensory condition of the sightless has created a negative toll on them by equating sightlessness to “moral/spiritual blindness” that is a negative metaphorical association. In the narrative, it can be said that Bartimeus was not only located at the fringe, but he was treated by the people as insignificant. Where does the narrative locate him? Presumably he was beside a wall, because this will aid him to navigate around the place. How did he know of Jesus' arrival? He “smells” something unusual in the air around him, an affirmation that Jesus is on the way. Obviously, he wants to be seen, thus his “cry-out”, but the sighted people shut him up, taking his action and himself to be a disturbance. Wow! Bartimeus was on the fringe, and still the sighted people see him a disturbance. He is ignored, but when he tried to make his presence felt, he becomes an inconvenience. Good thing that Jesus called for him. Has anyone aided him to Jesus? The story is silent about this, but we can assume that alone, he walked his way to Jesus, perhaps by touching the wall, the people, and “smelt” his way towards Jesus. His cry for mercy and Jesus' healing cements our interpretation and even our focus on curing the sightless; in turn today, they remain an object of pity, we see a loss/defect, and ascribe a negative metaphorical associations. They are a condition, and we forget they are humans. Can we not consider sightless positively? How are we to connect Jeremiah's promise of return to “home” and the sightless Bartimeus? Both seek and hope to reach “home”. Interestingly, Jericho seems to point at a sightless person's means of seeing; looking beyond its geographical mark, Jericho also means “fragrance” as well as it alludes to the wall/fenced city in Joshua. Hence, the “fragrance” of the wall (its touch) bespeaks of how a sightless perceives “home”. Similarly, *Abba* can also mean “freshness” or “safe-keeping”. Freshness or safety/security of a home can be as “fragrant” as a home-cooked food or the soft sofa, warm bed, but more so, “home” is where you feel safe, be this a place, people, or our self. The gospel challenges us to re-think about how to treat the sightless people, or those people seem far from being safe/secure, or the disabled people whose disability could be seen or unseen. In medicalizing, or metaphorizing sightless people, we internalize an *ableist* perspective, which effectively galvanizes our “othering” tendencies. The sighted people who want Bartimeus to shut-up, treated him as an insignificant “other”. This *ableist* and “othering” tendencies do to make the sightless and those with disability sense home, but they hope that in the future, sighted people will see them not a loss or defective human being. Rather, they hope that we listen to their stories, smell their authenticity and be touched by their being because their experience today could be ours in the future. A possibility that is difficult to admit, but indeed a human reality.

For Reflection and Discussion: 1. How did the story of Bartimeus influence your thinking about the sightless people? Are you in one way an *ableist*? 2. How can you make the sightless or the disabled feel at home? 3. What can we gain from being sightless?

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