“*Jesus and his disciples came to Jericho.”* That’s how our gospel begins today. It’s just another day on the road to Jerusalem. Now, we know, as well as those that travel with Jesus, the disciples and the ever present “crowd”, that it’s unlikely that any day is just another day. There are few “nothing to see here” days traveling with the Lord.

Jericho is a town about 15 miles outside of Jerusalem, a bedroom community if you will. Jericho was where Herod had his winter palace. It was a destination city. You couldn’t get to Jerusalem without going through Jericho. It resembles many of our own communities in some ways. There are those that are comfortably well-off, those that we might consider middle class, people that serve, people that are served, and there are those who are living on the edges.

On his way out of town, travelers meet a blind beggar sitting by the side of the road. In most ways this is simply another beggar, someone unable to make his way without the help of the community. The man, Bar-Timaeus, sits wrapped in his cloak, a portion of it laid before him, suggesting an alms basin, perhaps a few coins have been placed inside by those making their way past him.

This is an example of the social welfare system of the times. Jewish laws and traditions concerning treatment of the poor, widows, orphans and travelers grew directly from biblical commands. Jews took these biblical commands seriously. In New Testament times there was a specific term for these deeds, *gemilut chasidim*, the bestowal of loving kindness or acts of compassion. Citizens of Jericho would have been accustomed to seeing this person, and others like him, there alongside the road and perhaps they would have barely noticed his face or what he was wearing. This is simply blind Bar-Timaeus, if they even knew his name. Bar-Timaeus, meaning son of Timaeus, son of Honor. Bar-Timaeus, barely seen and certainly not heard.

But the blind beggar does hear, perhaps better than most folks do. And he is hearing about the teacher, the One who has been Sent. And he takes in the gossip, the casual remarks made in his presence by passers-by. This Jesus, he has discerned is no mere traveling healer.

“Jesus, Son of David”, he cries, “have mercy on me!” Jesus Son of David, here I am, here I am! Jesus!!

I can imagine the reaction of those around Bar-Timaeus. *What was that? Where did that God-awful noise come from? Oh Lord! It’s that blind beggar. I thought he was mute too.* Shhh! Shhh, over there! Leave Jesus alone.

Perhaps they need to remember that the last time someone shouted in Jericho, the walls came tumbling down!

“Son of David, Son of Daaaavid! Here I am! Have mercy on me!”

Jesus stood still at the sound and called for the blind man to come to him. We might notice at this point that the first healing that takes place is actually within the crowd. Their eyes are opened, they stop their “shushing” and “see” Bar-Timaeus, the person, for the first time. The showed him the way to Jesus. And perhaps they could also see the faith in him, not a faith borne of what might come for him from petitioning Jesus, but a persistent belief in Jesus’ ability to make a difference in the blind man’s life.

“My teacher, let me see again.” And he immediately gained his sight and followed Jesus on the way.

A simple prayer…..“My teacher, let me see again.”

Several weeks ago, Jamie and I and several other clergy from All Saints’ joined fellow colleagues from across the diocese in a 2 ½ day retreat with Br. David Vryhof from the Society of St. John the Evangelist. The focus of the retreat was about sabbath – why we need it and why God planted within us in the law the requirement for taking time away for refreshment and renewal.

It was a blessed time of community and contemplation of reading and of play. It was a true gift… letting go for a few hours of the things that generally occupy my time, most of which I enjoy and treasure, but often leave less time than I would like for placing my attention and intention on rest and connection. The most noticeable thing for me was to let go of the news – no NPR, no cable, no news apps on my I-Phone. The only television I indulged in was watching Jackie Bradley Jr. hit a grand slam home run. You should have heard us cheering and seen us jumping up and down with joy.

At the retreat Br. David approached sabbath time as a time that prepares, enriches and allows us to approach our day to day life and work from a place of fulfillment and wholeness, as opposed to the other way around. It’s less like that old song from Loverboy, “Everybody’s workin’ for the weekend” and more to the tune of Carole King’s “Up on the Roof”. Sabbath in God is the anchor for our hard work, rather than simply the reward for it.

But a sermon about sabbath, per se, is for another time. What I wanted to tell you was what happen to me after that brief time away. I found when I returned home I felt assaulted by the news; the noise of it, the voices, the cruelty, and honestly, the inhumanity of what I was hearing. I was scandalized at how people spoke about each other; how demonizing others has become normalized in so many ways. And most of all I heard my own voice, the one that runs in my head and often comes from my mouth. All it took for me was just a few days away from the cacophony for my eyes and ears to begin to open in a different way.

Praying to have our eyes opened can bring us blessing and challenge. We can see a world full of overwhelming beauty, and in the same way become painfully sensitized to people and conditions around us in ways we never expected to encounter. So what is next for us? For Bar-Timaeus, the son of Honor, what he sees before him is a life of discipleship. Many have been healed by Jesus, but few if any have decided to walk the way with him.

I have to say that what is in my heart today is the certain knowledge that what we are doing right now, the ways we are communicating, or not communicating with each other in our country right now isn’t working. We have an abundance of judgment and a scarcity of kindness. Mark Twain said, “*Kindness is the language that the deaf can hear and the blind can see.”*

There is a tale told of one of the desert Fathers, Abba Moses,

*Once one of the brothers committed a sin, and the elders assembled and sent for Abba Moses to come and pass judgement. He, however, did not want to go. Then the priest sent a message to him, saying: “Come, everybody is waiting for you.” So he finally got up to go. And he took a worn-out basket with holes, filled it with sand, and carried it along. The people who came to meet him said: “What is this?” Then the old man said: “My sins are running out behind me, yet I do not see them. And today I have come to judge the sins of someone else.” When they heard this, they said nothing to the brother and pardoned him.*

It is a hard thing, sometimes a nearly impossible endeavor, to resist judging, to resist demonizing those who we strongly disagree with. And yet, with the sand of our shortfalls trailing behind us, we are called to pray for those we don’t want to pray for, and we are called to love others as we are loved by the One who made us in love. We are called to our duty in the spirit of *gemilut chasidim*, loving kindness and acts of compassion.

Henri Nouwen said this, “*Kindness is a beautiful human attribute. When we say, “She is a kind person” or “He surely was kind to me,” we express a very warm feeling. In our competitive and often violent world, kindness is not the most frequent response. But when we encounter it we know that we are blessed. Is it possible to grow in kindness, to become a kind person? Yes, but it requires discipline. To be kind means to treat another person as your “kin,” your intimate relative. We say, “We are kin” or “He is next of kin.” To be kind is to reach out to someone as being of “kindred” spirit. Here is the great challenge: All people are called to be kind to one another, treating one another as brothers and sisters. There is hardly a day in our lives in which we are not called to this.”*

In the gospel I was struck by the action of Bar-Timaeus throwing off his cloak and springing up to meet Jesus. That cloak was likely his most valuable possession. It kept him warm in the night, dry in the rain. It served as shelter and a vessel for collecting the kindness of strangers. It held his identity in so many ways. And yet, he cast it aside for the uncertainty of what was to come next.

In throwing off his cloak he embraces new life, eyes opened. We too, you and I, are invited to throw off the cloak of our old lives, old fears, old ways of being, to spring up and meet the face of our Lord. Go your way in kindness, as if seeing it for the first time.

Amen.