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Sermon – Mark 10:46-52
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Being human is kind of a fascinating project. Just yesterday at our cluster gathering we were exploring our spirituality through the body, mind, heart and soul. So much variety in connecting with God. Similarly, for humans, knowing can show up in many ways. Here in the information age we depend more on the ability to look up knowledge than the memorization we did earlier in life. Deeper than facts is the kind of knowing that comes from years of study: it's information that has been synthesized and integrated in us over time. We know our spouses or best friends through years of conversation and shared experiences, curiosity and vulnerability. This knowing might live in our hearts rather than our heads. Another kind of knowing might be a skill, like playing a musical instrument, driving a car or building something. This kind of knowing might live in the mind, but also lives in the body. We're also aware of an intuitive knowing; things that pop into our minds or speak to us in body parts and emotions, seemingly out of nowhere.

While our culture is fixated on not so much knowing, but information, the latest information, drawing us into relationships with screens and apps, which are incredibly useful for some things, our walk with Jesus invites us into something deeper. As I prayed with this week's gospel reading, a tool that I've learned in workshops over the years popped into my head. I don't know its official name, but I'm calling it the Matrix of Knowing. It's a way of taking an inventory of what you know in a given situation or project, effectively locating one's self in the midst of it all.

The exercise goes like this: you take a piece of paper and make 4 quadrants on the page. The first is things you know that you know, your working knowledge, things you've learned, integrated.

Second quadrant is Known Unknowns, the things we know we don't know. I know that I don't know how to skateboard; I could learn, and I might when the skate park goes in, but at present I don't know how. This is also the quadrant of smart phones: things we can look up or contact someone to get specific information.

Third quadrant, unknown knowns, things we don't realize we know – this is the hardest one to understand and explain. I've been playing cello with Allannah, picking up classical music again very slowly. We were playing a duet together and all of a sudden my classical music brain turned on and I started using technique that I didn't realize my fingers still knew how to do. Unknown knowns – aha, I can still do this!

The fourth and last quadrant is the unknown unknown; this is our blind spot, these are the things we don't even know to ask or consider. This is a place of prayer, this is where God lives, the ultimate mystery; we can learn things about God, and we do continually, but again, as my friend Rev. Jason Byassee says, if you understand it, it's not God. So this is a place of prayer . . . God help us to know you more . . . this morning's scripture says it a bit differently: "God help us to see."

At first blush, the healing story before us is about physical sight, but I was curious about the Greek word used there – I didn't know it – 2nd quadrant known unknowns – I looked it up on Blue Letter Bible with my smart phone during Bible study on Tuesday – and found 2 meanings. First, physical sight, Bartimaeus is receiving physical sight again. But the word is also used when Jesus looks up to heaven to give thanks for bread before distributing the loaves to the 5,000. "Looks up" to heaven is the same Greek word as receiving sight. What does Jesus see when he looks up to heaven? Perhaps this scripture

goes beyond seeing with our eyes to seeing with our hearts. Our prayer is: “God, help us to see . . . help us to understand.”

Let’s explore the scripture using the Matrix of Knowing and see what we find, beginning with the crowds: the text doesn’t tell us exactly who they are, but we can work out that they include disciples and locals. What do they know? They know for sure that Jesus is an important guy, he is doing something crucial, and anyone near him gets noticed.

But they haven’t really seen Jesus – Jesus’ true identity is in their blind spot. Last week James and John came to Jesus with an inquiry. When they approached Jesus, he said, “What would you like me to do for you?” It is the exact same question Jesus asks Bartimaeus in this morning’s reading. James and John answered, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” Jesus probed them further, knowing that just by asking that question, they had proven their ignorance of Jesus ministry. Jesus’ ministry for them belongs in the Unknown Unknown quadrant, the blind spot. They have not really seen Jesus – they want to feel important, not be of service.

Furthermore, they treat Bartimaeus in an appalling manner. They think Bartimaeus belongs for them in the Known Known quadrant; they think they know who he is because of the way he presents himself. They make assumptions that he is worthless and a distraction for Jesus and tell him to keep quiet. But they are wrong and are about to discover that this blind beggar can see what they cannot.

The Matrix of Knowing looks vastly different for Bartimaeus. What does he know for sure? He knows Jesus has the ability and heart to heal him. He knows Jesus’ identity as a Rabbi, a teacher, and as a descendant of King David. The promise of the coming Messiah is that he would follow in David’s footsteps and restore Israel. Bartimaeus sees this identity in Jesus, even though he can’t see Jesus’ face.

When Bartimaeus gets the message to approach Jesus, he knows he will no longer need the cloak he has spread out to collect money and tosses it aside, abandoning his old life, even before he has entered a new one. He sees so clearly, he lets go of everything and walks toward his future.

Bartimaeus may not have been able to articulate his actions as faithful at the time, but he is intentional about all of it. Faith was an unknown known for Bartimaeus until Jesus observed him, listened to him and named what he saw in Bartimaeus as faith. Everything Bartimaeus expressed and is about in this scene adds up to a huge amount of faith and Jesus affirms it by saying, “your faith has made you whole.” In turn, Bartimaeus puts his faith into action as he follows Jesus on the way. And which way is that? The path of discipleship, for sure, spending intentional time with Jesus and learning and growing from his teaching . . . but the way is headed somewhere specific.

Jesus and his disciples have just passed through Jericho on their way to Jerusalem, where Jesus will turn over the tables, eat with his friends and be crucified. In fact, the very next scene in Mark’s gospel is Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, with crowds cheering and palms waving in the air.

Does Jesus see all of that as he walks along the way? I wonder . . . I wonder what he knows as he walks that road, and what is completely hidden from him.

This healing with Bartimaeus has brought to a close the section of Mark where Jesus does intentional discipleship with his followers. Between two healings of people’s sight, the first in chapter 8 and the second here in chapter 10, Jesus concentrates his teaching, doing his best to get through to the disciples . . . he is running out of time. Jesus can teach, explain, illustrate his points and do it all again until he has to go off alone to pray, but until the disciples are ready, he cannot make them see. They are not ready. They will become ready, but they must walk farther along the way before their eyes are opened.

Jesus restores sight in this story to the one who knows he is blind and makes him whole; Bartimaeus' faith made him whole, not just well, but the fullness of the word's meaning in the Greek is "wholeness." What does this mean for us? There is something special and holy about the unknown unknown, the place of mystery and prayer. It seems like this place of mystery could also be a place of beautiful aha's, probably some shadows, and a lot of grace. Learning and growing in Christ is this process of moving things from our blind spot through the matrix until they are integrated in us. We are able to see and able to be healed when we are ready to learn what lies within the mystery; Jesus meets us there, knowing the time has come.