

**PENTECOST:
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 25

October 25, 2009

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Psalm 126

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 10:46-52

An Inconvenient Truth

On October 7, 2009, a circle of dignitaries unveiled a statue of 7-year-old Helen Keller in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. The statue, the first of a marginalized and disabled person in the Rotunda, shows Keller, blind since she was 19 months old, with one hand under a water pump. The work depicts the moment when Keller learned to “see” the connection between the water spilling over one hand and the letters W-A-T-E-R that Keller’s teacher Anne Sullivan traced in the other hand.

The work of art freeze-frames a truth that is biblical and inconvenient and shown in this week’s Gospel story about Blind Bartimeus (Mark 10:46-52): the blind see but the seeing are blind.

The Bible as a whole, not just our Gospel passage, delights in putting inconvenient books and truths on the table. Job, for example, causes theologians of prosperity to go apoplectic.

Blind Bartimeus is also inconveniently truthful. Of course a domesticating and romanticizing translation and treatment of this healing story directs us to celebrate a blind beggar whose faith leads Jesus to restore his sight. But this reading patronizes us, offering us easy self-congratulation and skewing the story’s point which hoists sighted readers on their own petard: why does a blind beggar recognize Jesus while sighted bystanders do not?

Mark weaves this inconvenient truth again and again into his Gospel narrative, sometimes literally, other times metaphorically. When Jesus teaches in parables, he assumes that the sighted will not grasp his point (4:12). When Jesus feeds four thousand followers, he goes face to face with the blindness of his closest disciples (8:18).

That the blind see and the seeing are blind is not just skilled rhetoric. It’s one of the paradoxes that belong to a larger set of paradoxical and inconvenient truths associated with the gift of faith. Paul expresses this paradoxical twisting of normal expectations in

his so-called antithetical view of apostolic life and faith: when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:10, *GNT*); when we are cursed, we bless (1 Corinthians 4:12, *GNT*); we are often troubled, but not crushed; sometimes in doubt but never in despair; ... At all times we carry in our mortal bodies the death of Jesus, so that his life also may be seen in our bodies (2 Corinthians 4:8-10, *GNT*).

In this inconvenient truth there is good news, however inconceivable and contradictory: People on the world's margins are at the center of God's care.

Imagine gazing at the Rotunda's paintings, friezes, frescoes, statues and busts depicting the sighted explorers, colonial and revolutionary period personages, presidents and other notables whose "vision" of a new Eden the Rotunda celebrates. Then consider the statue of a 7-year-old blind girl from Tusculum, Alabama. Who's got true sight? Who is blind? Who's on the margin? Who's in the center?

This week's Reflection was prepared by Robert Hodgson, Jr., Ph.D., Dean Emeritus of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship at the American Bible Society.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: New Zealand – With thanks to God for devoted supporters who place a high value on God's Word, and with prayers for new initiatives to encourage greater use of God's Word and to promote it across the country; **Australia** – With thanks to God that the Kriol Bible is impacting the lives of Aboriginal people in Northern Australia, and with prayers for God's blessing on those who are continuing translation work in other Aboriginal languages or preparing resources to help Aboriginal people engage with God's Word, and with prayers for ongoing work to reach young people through innovative publications and electronic media, and with prayers for the impact of special Bible editions for surfers and for nurses; **East Timor** – With thanks to God for progress in translating the Gospel of Luke into Fataluku and for its publication by the end of 2009, and with prayers for God to bless the witness and ministry of the Churches in East Timor, and with prayers for stability in this new nation and that infrastructure and services will continue to develop.

Activity Corner: "All Eyes on Jesus"

Supplies needed: Bible; writing paper; pens or pencils; blindfold (for alternate activity)

Read together Mark 10:46-52 and discuss what it means to be called by Jesus to be a disciple and to have faith in Jesus. Distribute writing paper and pens or pencils. Ask each one to write the words "Seeing with Eyes of Faith" across the top and to copy Hebrews 12:2a. (In the *Good News Translation* it reads: "Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end.") Then invite each one to list how they "see" Jesus today through "eyes of faith." Conclude by singing together "Amazing Grace" or one of your favorite hymns.

Gather members of your household in a circle. Take turns putting a blindfold on each one, and designate someone to read (perhaps in a disguised voice) Hebrews 12:2a. Ask the blindfolded person to guess who read the Bible verse.