



from TORCH TRUST

Sight Loss Sunday Sermon Notes.





Sight Loss Sunday Sermon Notes

Purpose:

- to get people thinking about the barriers we may inadvertently create to people meeting Jesus
- to inspire people to be welcoming and invitational
- to challenge our church to see and use everyone's gifts

Mark 10:46-52

This story contains a contrast between the crowd's response to Bartimaeus and Jesus' response.

The Crowd.

They present a barrier to Bartimaeus meeting Jesus. They tell him to be quiet. Some even are stern and order him to 'shut up'. They think that Bartimaeus is just being a nuisance and maybe ruining the event taking place. Everyone is out to meet Jesus and maybe hear what he says, so having someone shouting in the background is just annoying. It seems an incredible situation that someone is crying out to Jesus and other people are trying to prevent them from meeting with Jesus. I'm sure you long for people to meet Jesus. We can easily think that we would never prevent someone from meeting Jesus. But are we also guilty of putting barriers between someone else and Jesus?

People with sight loss often experience or feel that there are barriers to attending church, to being included in activities and using their gifts. Of course, church does not mean the same as meeting Jesus. But being welcomed and part of a church family is certainly a great place to meet with Jesus. The welcoming of everyone into our church communities is a vital part of our mission. This is especially true for blind and partially sighted people who are often not able to boldly step forward and introduce themselves. How good are we as a church community at welcoming people? Are there barriers in place that prevent people from meeting with Jesus at our church? Can everyone join in fully during the service? Has everyone got the opportunity to use the gifts that God has given them?





Jesus.

Jesus' response to Bartimaeus sits in contrast to the crowd's response. Instead of ignoring, or silencing, or rebuking, Jesus calls Bartimaeus to come to him. He then does something that might seem obvious, but often we fail to do. He asks Bartimaeus 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus is interested in Bartimaeus and he wants to listen to him and hear what he has to say. Jesus asks this same question of his disciples earlier in the chapter in verse 36. The disciples' response is a selfish request for position and status, which shows Jesus they do not understand what they are asking for. Bartimaeus' response is a request for sight. He asks Jesus to meet his basic need. And Jesus does heal Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus meets Jesus and then follows him.

How good are you and we as a church at asking people how we can help them, rather than just expecting them to fit in with whatever we want to provide? Maybe when we see someone new, someone being hesitant or holding back, someone struggling with their child, we should start by asking the question that Jesus did: "What can I do for you? Is there anything I can help you with?"

Jesus welcomes everyone to meet with him.

Jesus does not place barriers in our way – he removes them. Meeting Jesus is good news for everyone. The most important thing for each one of us is have the opportunity to meet Jesus. The most important thing for people with sight loss is have the opportunity to meet Jesus. Not because they have sight loss, but because like everyone of us we each need Jesus.

What About Me?

You might like to use the following story about how Torch first started producing large print books. Stella Heath writes:

We were visiting a club where blind and deaf-blind people were gathering. Several of the people were talking about the magazines which we had sent to them.

'But what about me?' said a rather rough-looking lady whose name was Chrissie. We could tell that she was profoundly deaf, for one of the helpers in the club had been relaying our conversation on her hands using sign language. She had extra thick lenses in her glasses, and could obviously see just about enough to move around the room.

Chrissie grabbed me by the lapel of my jacket. 'What about me? I say, I want to know about God too! I can't hear a tape, and I can't manage braille. What can you do for me? I can see newspaper headlines, that's all.'





What could we say to her? Our output of braille and tape recordings would never meet this lady's need. Giving my coat another tug, she stood waiting for an answer I couldn't give her. But when we went home our hearts ached for Chrissie. She lived alone in a flat and had very few friends. It was not surprising as she seemed to fall out with everyone who had much to do with her. She was sure the people in the next flat were taking her post, her milk and anything else she failed to find. Those neighbours were distraught. They had tried to help her on several occasions, but had always been accused of robbing her.

'She's just completely paranoid', said the leader of the club, himself a very caring man.

'I can only read newspaper headlines' – Chrissie's plea haunted us. Were there many like her? Was it at all possible for us to do anything?

We decided to write out in block capitals one of our smaller magazines, and to present it to her as a surprise at the next club.

'This is marvellous!' she exclaimed, getting so fervent about it that she almost lost her ill-fitting false teeth. 'Marvellous! You wait till I show it to my friends!'

We hadn't thought of that!

Sure enough, next time we met, Chrissie had a list of her friends who wanted to have literature in giant print. But what could we do? A group of ladies at church offered to print a dozen copies of portions of Scripture and magazines by hand for this little group. Fine, for a month. But then more people began to ask for it. We had reached the limit of the time our ladies could give.

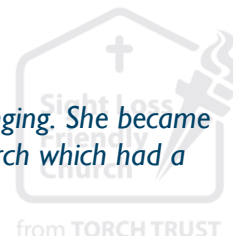
'I can stay after work and use our firm's duplicator to make a few copies if you like', said one of the husbands. Mind you, duplicating in those days was not the fine job it is today. The paper was curled with the heat of the machine, and the background was grey. Still, he tried!

'Great', the blind friends all cried.

But soon our helpful friend reached the limit of his ability to do the duplicating. More copies were wanted than we could ever manage to cope with this way. What could we do? We started to look into different ways of duplicating: flat beds, cylinders, printers, what a selection we tried!

Most of all we wanted to give our new friends the Scriptures. So we enlisted the help of numerous tidy writers to write the whole of the Revised Standard Version in quarter-inch high capitals by hand. It took years!





Meanwhile Chrissie, who had started us trying to meet the need for giant print, was changing. She became a new person in Christ, and was publicly baptised, becoming an ardent member of a church which had a unit for the deaf. 'The entrance of Thy word giveth light' (Ps. 119:130) – how true!

Excerpt from 'Coping with the Camel – The story of God's remarkable work with the Torch Trust for the Blind' by Stella Heath.

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Sight Loss Sunday

Equipping churches to enable blind and partially sighted people to contribute to church life.